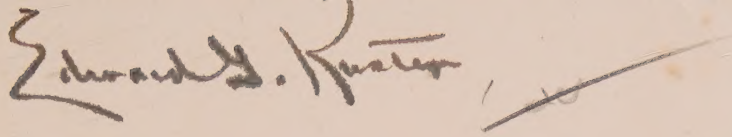
# PLAYS, ACTING AND MUSIC

ARTHUR SYMONS



# PLAYS, ACTING, AND MUSIC

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# PLAYS
# ACTING AND MUSIC

## A BOOK OF THEORY

BY
ARTHUR SYMONS

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*To Maurice Maeterlinck in friendship and admiration*

# PREFACE

When this book was first published it contained a large amount of material which is now taken out of it; additions have been made, besides many corrections and changes; and the whole form of the book has been remodelled. It is now more what it ought to have been from the first; what I saw, from the moment of its publication, that it ought to have been: a book of theory. The rather formal announcement of my intentions which I made in my preface is reprinted here, because, at all events, the programme was carried out.

This book, I said then, is intended to form part of a series, on which I have been engaged for many years. I am gradually working my way towards the concrete expression of a theory, or system of æsthetics, of all the arts.

In my book on "The Symbolist Move-

ment in Literature" I made a first attempt to deal in this way with literature; other volumes, now in preparation, are to follow. The present volume deals mainly with the stage, and, secondarily, with music; it is to be followed by a volume called "Studies in Seven Arts," in which music will be dealt with in greater detail, side by side with painting, sculpture, architecture, handicraft, dancing, and the various arts of the stage. And, as life too is a form of art, and the visible world the chief storehouse of beauty, I try to indulge my curiosity by the study of places and of people. A book on "Cities" is now in the press, and a book of "imaginary portraits" is to follow, under the title of "Spiritual Adventures." Side by side with these studies in the arts I have my own art, that of verse, which is, after all, my chief concern.

In all my critical and theoretical writing I wish to be as little abstract as possible, and to study first principles, not so much as they exist in the brain of the theorist, but as they may be discovered, alive and in

effective action, in every achieved form of art. I do not understand the limitation by which so many writers on æsthetics choose to confine themselves to the study of artistic principles as they are seen in this or that separate form of art. Each art has its own laws, its own capacities, its own limits; these it is the business of the critic jealously to distinguish. Yet in the study of art as art, it should be his endeavour to master the universal science of beauty.

1903, 1907.

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# INTRODUCTION

# AN APOLOGY FOR PUPPETS

After seeing a ballet, a farce, and the fragment of an opera performed by the marionettes at the Costanzi Theatre in Rome, I am inclined to ask myself why we require the intervention of any less perfect medium between the meaning of a piece, as the author conceived it, and that other meaning which it derives from our reception of it. The living actor, even when he condescends to subordinate himself to the requirements of pantomime, has always what he is proud to call his temperament; in other words, so much personal caprice, which for the most part means wilful misunderstanding; and in seeing his acting you have to consider this intrusive little personality of his as well as the author's. The marionette may be relied upon. He will respond to an indication without reserve or revolt; an error on

his part (we are all human) will certainly be the fault of the author; he can be trained to perfection. As he is painted, so will he smile; as the wires lift or lower his hands, so will his gestures be; and he will dance when his legs are set in motion.

Seen at a distance, the puppets cease to be an amusing piece of mechanism, imitating real people; there is no difference. I protest that the Knight who came in with his plumed hat, his shining sword, and flung back his long cloak with so fine a sweep of the arm, was exactly the same to me as if he had been a living actor, dressed in the same clothes, and imitating the gesture of a knight; and that the contrast of what was real, as we say, under the fiction appears to me less ironical in the former than in the latter. We have to allow, you will admit, at least as much to the beneficent heightening of travesty, if we have ever seen the living actor in the morning, not yet shaved, standing at the bar, his hat on one side, his mouth spreading in that abandonment to laughter which has become from the necessity of his

profession, a natural trick; oh, much more, I think, than if we merely come upon an always decorative, never an obtrusive, costumed figure, leaning against the wall, nonchalantly enough, in a corner of the coulisses.

To sharpen our sense of what is illusive in the illusion of the puppets, let us sit not too far from the stage. Choosing our place carefully, we shall have the satisfaction of always seeing the wires at their work, while I think we shall lose nothing of what is most savoury in the feast of the illusion. There is not indeed the appeal to the senses of the first row of the stalls at a ballet of living dancers. But is not that a trifle too obvious sentiment for the true artist in artificial things? Why leave the ball-room? It is not nature that one looks for on the stage in this kind of spectacle, and our excitement in watching it should remain purely intellectual. If you prefer that other kind of illusion, go a little further away, and, I assure you, you will find it quite easy to fall in love with a marionette. I have seen the most adorable heads, with real hair too,

among the wooden dancers of a theatre of puppets; faces which might easily, with but a little of that good-will which goes to all falling in love, seem the answer to a particular dream, making all other faces in the world but spoilt copies of this inspired piece of painted wood.

But the illusion, to a more scrupulous taste, will consist simply in that complication of view which allows us to see wood and wire imitating an imitation, and which delights us less when seen at what is called the proper distance, where the two are indistinguishable, than when seen from just the point where all that is crudely mechanical hides the comedy of what is, absolutely, a deception. Losing, as we do, something of the particularity of these painted faces, we are able to enjoy all the better what it is certainly important we should appreciate, if we are truly to appreciate our puppets. This is nothing less than a fantastic, yet a direct, return to the masks of the Greeks: that learned artifice by which tragedy and comedy were assisted in speaking to the

world with the universal voice, by this deliberate generalising of emotion. It will be a lesson to some of our modern notions; and it may be instructive for us to consider that we could not give a play of Ibsen's to marionettes, but that we could give them the "Agamemnon."

Above all, for we need it above all, let the marionettes remind us that the art of the theatre should be beautiful first, and then indeed what you will afterwards. Gesture on the stage is the equivalent of rhythm in verse, and it can convey, as a perfect rhythm should, not a little of the inner meaning of words, a meaning perhaps more latent in things. Does not gesture indeed make emotion, more certainly and more immediately than emotion makes gesture? You may feel that you may suppress emotion; but assume a smile, lifted eyebrows, a clenched fist, and it is impossible for you not to assume along with the gesture, if but for a moment, the emotion to which that gesture corresponds. In our marionettes, then, we get personified gesture, and the gesture, like all other

forms of emotion, generalised. The appeal in what seems to you these childish manœuvres is to a finer, because to a more intimately poetic, sense of things than the merely rationalistic appeal of very modern plays. If at times we laugh, it is with wonder at seeing humanity so gay, heroic, and untiring. There is the romantic suggestion of magic in this beauty.

Maeterlinck wrote on the title-page of one of his volumes "Drames pour marionettes," no doubt to intimate his sense of the symbolic value, in the interpretation of a profound inner meaning of that external nullity which the marionette by its very nature emphasises. And so I find my puppets, where the extremes meet, ready to interpret not only the "Agamemnon," but "La Mort de Tintagiles"; for the soul, which is to make, we may suppose, the drama of the future, is content with as simple a mouthpiece as Fate and the great passions, which were the classic drama.

# PLAYS AND ACTING

## NIETZSCHE ON TRAGEDY

I HAVE been reading Nietzsche on the Origin of Tragedy with the delight of one who discovers a new world, which he has seen already in a dream. I never take up Nietzsche without the surprise of finding something familiar. Sometimes it is the answer to a question which I have only asked; sometimes it seems to me that I have guessed at the answer. And, in his restless energy, his hallucinatory vision, the agility of this climbing mind of the mountains, I find that invigoration which only a "tragic philosopher" can give. "A sort of mystic soul," as he says of himself, "almost the soul of a Mænad, who, troubled, capricious, and half irresolute whether to cede or fly, stammers out something in a foreign tongue."

The book is a study in the origin of tragedy among the Greeks, as it arose out

of music through the medium of the chorus. We are apt to look on the chorus in Greek plays as almost a negligible part of the structure; as, in fact, hardly more than the comments of that "ideal spectator" whom Schlegel called up out of the depths of the German consciousness. We know, however, that the chorus was the original nucleus of the play, that the action on which it seems only to comment is no more than a development of the chorus. Here is the problem to which Nietzsche endeavours to find an answer. He finds it, unlike the learned persons who study Greek texts, among the roots of things, in the very making of the universe. Art arises, he tells us, from the conflict of the two creative spirits, symbolised by the Greeks in the two gods, Apollo and Dionysus; and he names the one the Apollonian spirit, which we see in plastic art, and the other the Dionysiac spirit, which we see in music. Apollo is the god of dreams, Dionysus the god of intoxication; the one represents for us the world of appearances, the other is, as it were, the voice of things in

themselves. The chorus, then, which arose out of the hymns to Dionysus, is the "lyric cry," the vital ecstasy; the drama is the projection into vision, into a picture, of the exterior, temporary world of forms. "We now see that the stage and the action are conceived only as vision: that the sole 'reality' is precisely the chorus, which itself produces the vision, and expresses it by the aid of the whole symbolism of dance, sound, and word." In the admirable phrase of Schiller, the chorus is "a living rampart against reality," against that false reality of daily life which is a mere drapery of civilisation, and has nothing to do with the primitive reality of nature. The realistic drama begins with Euripides; and Euripides, the casuist, the friend of Socrates (whom Nietzsche qualifies as the true decadent, an "instrument of decomposition," the slayer of art, the father of modern science), brings tragedy to an end, as he substitutes pathos for action, thought for contemplation, and passionate sentiments for the primitive ecstasy. "Armed with the scourge of its

syllogisms, an optimist dialectic drives the music out of tragedy: that is to say, destroys the very essence of tragedy, an essence which can be interpreted only as a manifestation and objectivation of Dionysiac states, as a visible symbol of music, as the dream-world of a Dionysiac intoxication."

There are many pages, scattered throughout his work, in which Pater has dealt with some of the Greek problems very much in the spirit of Nietzsche; with that problem, for instance, of the "blitheness and serenity" of the Greek spirit, and of the gulf of horror over which it seems to rest, suspended as on the wings of the condor. That myth of Dionysus Zagreus, "a Bacchus who had been in hell," which is the foundation of the marvellous new myth of "Denys l'Auxerrois," seems always to be in the mind of Nietzsche, though indeed he refers to it but once, and passingly. Pater has shown, as Nietzsche shows in greater detail and with a more rigorous logic, that this "serenity" was but an accepted illusion, and all Olympus itself but "intermediary," an escape,

through the æsthetics of religion, from the trouble at the heart of things; art, with its tragic illusions of life, being another form of escape. To Nietzsche the world and existence justify themselves only as an æsthetic phenomenon, the work of a god wholly the artist; "and in this sense the object of the tragic myth is precisely to convince us that even the horrible and the monstrous are no more than an æsthetic game played with itself by the Will in the eternal plenitude of its joy." "The Will" is Schopenhauer's "Will," the vital principle. "If it were possible," says Nietzsche, in one of his astonishing figures of speech, "to imagine a dissonance becoming a human being (and what is man but that?), in order to endure life, this dissonance would need some admirable illusion to hide from itself its true nature, under a veil of beauty." This is the aim of art, as it calls up pictures of the visible world and of the little temporary actions of men on its surface. The hoofed satyr of Dionysus, as he leaps into the midst of these gracious appearances, drunk with the young

wine of nature, surly with the old wisdom of Silenus, brings the real, excessive, disturbing truth of things suddenly into the illusion; and is gone again, with a shrill laugh, without forcing on us more of his presence than we can bear.

I have but touched on a few points in an argument which has itself the ecstatic quality of which it speaks. A good deal of the book is concerned with the latest development of music, and especially with Wagner. Nietzsche, after his change of sides, tells us not to take this part too seriously: "what I fancied I heard in the Wagnerian music has nothing to do with Wagner." Few better things have been said about music than these pages; some of them might be quoted against the "programme" music which has been written since that time, and against the false theory on which musicians have attempted to harness music in the shafts of literature. The whole book is awakening; in Nietzsche's own words, "a prodigious hope speaks in it."

## SARAH BERNHARDT

I AM not sure that the best moment to study an artist is not the moment of what is called decadence. The first energy of inspiration is gone; what remains is the method, the mechanism, and it is that which alone one can study, as one can study the mechanism of the body, not the principle of life itself. What is done mechanically, after the heat of the blood has cooled, and the divine accidents have ceased to happen, is precisely all that was consciously skilful in the performance of an art. To see all this mechanism left bare, as the form of the skeleton is left bare when age thins the flesh upon it, is to learn more easily all that is to be learnt of structure, the art which not art but nature has hitherto concealed with its merciful covering.

The art of Sarah Bernhardt has always been a very conscious art, but it spoke to

us, once, with so electrical a shock, as if nerve touched nerve, or the mere "contour subtil" of the voice were laid tinglingly on one's spinal cord, that it was difficult to analyse it coldly. She was Phèdre or Marguerite Gautier, she was Adrienne Lecouvreur, Fédora, La Tosca, the actual woman, and she was also that other actual woman, Sarah Bernhardt. Two magics met and united, in the artist and the woman, each alone of its kind. There was an excitement in going to the theatre; one's pulses beat feverishly before the curtain had risen; there was almost a kind of obscure sensation of peril, such as one feels when the lioness leaps into the cage, on the other side of the bars. And the acting was like a passionate declaration, offered to some one unknown; it was as if the whole nervous force of the audience were sucked out of it and flung back, intensified, upon itself, as it encountered the single, insatiable, indomitable nervous force of the woman. And so, in its way, this very artificial acting seemed the mere instinctive, irresistible expression of a temperament; it

mesmerised one, awakening the senses and sending the intelligence to sleep.

After all, though Réjane skins emotions alive, and Duse serves them up to you on golden dishes, it is Sarah Bernhardt who prepares the supreme feast. In "La Dame aux Camélias," still, she shows herself, as an actress, the greatest actress in the world. It is all sheer acting; there is no suggestion, as with Duse, there is no canaille attractiveness, as with Réjane; the thing is plastic, a modelling of emotion before you, with every vein visible; she leaves nothing to the imagination, gives you every motion, all the physical signs of death, all the fierce abandonment to every mood, to grief, to delight, to lassitude. When she suffers, in the scene, for instance, where Armand insults her, she is like a trapped wild beast which some one is torturing, and she wakes just that harrowing pity. One's whole flesh suffers with her flesh; her voice caresses and excites like a touch; it has a throbbing, monotonous music, which breaks deliciously, which pauses suspended, and then resolves itself in a perfect

chord. Her voice is like a thing detachable from herself, a thing which she takes in her hands like a musical instrument, playing on the stops cunningly with her fingers. Prose, when she speaks it, becomes a kind of verse, with all the rhythms, the vocal harmonies, of a kind of human poetry. Her whisper is heard across the whole theatre, every syllable distinct, and yet it is really a whisper. She comes on the stage like a miraculous painted idol, all nerves; she runs through the gamut of the sex, and ends a child, when the approach of death brings Marguerite back to that deep infantile part of woman. She plays the part now with the accustomed ease of one who puts on and off an old shoe. It is almost a part of her; she knows it through all her senses. And she moved me as much last night as she moved me when I first saw her play the part eleven or twelve years ago. To me, sitting where I was not too near the stage, she might have been five-and-twenty. I saw none of the mechanism of the art, as I saw it in "L'Aiglon"; here art still concealed art. Her vitality was equal to the

vitality of Réjane; it is differently expressed, that is all. With Réjane the vitality is direct; it is the appeal of Gavroche, the sharp, impudent urchin of the streets; Sarah Bernhardt's vitality is electrical, and shoots its currents through all manner of winding ways. In form it belongs to an earlier period, just as the writing of Dumas fils belongs to an earlier period than the writing of Meilhac. It comes to us with the tradition to which it has given life; it does not spring into our midst, unruly as nature.

But it is in "Phèdre" that Sarah Bernhardt must be seen, if we are to realise all that her art is capable of. In writing "Phèdre," Racine anticipated Sarah Bernhardt. If the part had been made for her by a poet of our own days, it could not have been brought more perfectly within her limits, nor could it have more perfectly filled those limits to their utmost edge. It is one of the greatest parts in poetical drama, and it is written with a sense of the stage not less sure than its sense of dramatic

poetry. There was a time when Racine was looked upon as old-fashioned, as conventional, as frigid. It is realised nowadays that his verse has cadences like the cadences of Verlaine, that his language is as simple and direct as prose, and that he is one of the most passionate of poets. Of the character of Phèdre Racine tells us that it is "ce que j'ai peut-être mis de plus raisonnable sur le théâtre." The word strikes oddly on our ears, but every stage of the passion of Phèdre is indeed reasonable, logical, as only a French poet, since the Greeks themselves, could make it. The passion itself is an abnormal, an insane thing, and that passion comes to us with all its force and all its perversity; but the words in which it is expressed are never extravagant, they are always clear, simple, temperate, perfectly precise and explicit. The art is an art exquisitely balanced between the conventional and the realistic, and the art of Sarah Bernhardt, when she plays the part, is balanced with just the same unerring skill. She seems to abandon herself wholly, at times, to

her "fureurs"; she tears the words with her teeth, and spits them out of her mouth, like a wild beast ravening upon prey; but there is always dignity, restraint, a certain remoteness of soul, and there is always the verse, and her miraculous rendering of the verse, to keep Racine in the right atmosphere. Of what we call acting there is little, little change in the expression of the face. The part is a part for the voice, and it is only in "Phèdre" that one can hear that orchestra, her voice, in all its variety of beauty. In her modern plays, plays in prose, she is condemned to use only a few of the instruments of the orchestra: an actress must, in such parts, be conversational, and for how much beauty or variety is there room in modern conversation? But here she has Racine's verse, along with Racine's psychology, and the language has nothing more to offer the voice of a tragic actress. She seems to speak her words, her lines, with a kind of joyful satisfaction; all the artist in her delights in the task. Her nerves are in it, as well as her intelligence; but everything is

coloured by the poetry, everything is subordinate to beauty.

Well, and she seems still to be the same Phèdre that she was eleven or twelve years ago, as she is the same "Dame aux Camélias." Is it reality, is it illusion? Illusion, perhaps, but an illusion which makes itself into a very effectual kind of reality. She has played these pieces until she has got them, not only by heart, but by every nerve and by every vein, and now the ghost of the real thing is so like the real thing that there is hardly any telling the one from the other. It is the living on of a mastery once absolutely achieved, without so much as the need of a new effort. The test of the artist, the test which decides how far the artist is still living, as more than a force of memory, lies in the power to create a new part, to bring new material to life. Last year, in "L'Aiglon," it seemed to me that Sarah Bernhardt showed how little she still possessed that power, and this year I see the same failure in "Francesca da Rimini."

The play, it must be admitted, is hope-

lessly poor, common, melodramatic, without atmosphere, without nobility, subtlety, or passion; it degrades the story which we owe to Dante and not to history (for, in itself, the story is a quite ordinary story of adultery: Dante and the flames of his hell purged it), it degrades it almost out of all recognition. These middle-aged people, who wrangle shrewishly behind the just turned back of the husband and almost in the hearing of the child, are people in whom it is impossible to be interested, apart from any fine meanings put into them in the acting. And yet, since M. de Max has made hardly less than a creation out of the part of Giovanni, filling it, as he has, with his own nervous force and passionately restrained art, might it not have been possible once for Sarah Bernhardt to have thrilled us even as this Francesca of Mr. Marion Crawford? I think so; she has taken bad plays as willingly as good plays, to turn them to her own purpose, and she has been as triumphant, if not as fine, in bad plays as in good ones. Now her Francesca is lifeless, a melodious

image, making meaningless music. She says over the words, cooingly, chantingly, or frantically, as the expression marks, to which she seems to act, demand. The interest is in following her expression-marks.

The first thing one notices in her acting, when one is free to watch it coolly, is the way in which she subordinates effects to effect. She has her crescendos, of course, and it is these which people are most apt to remember, but the extraordinary force of these crescendos comes from the smooth and level manner in which the main part of the speaking is done. She is not anxious to make points at every moment, to put all the possible emphasis into every separate phrase; I have heard her glide over really significant phrases which, taken by themselves, would seem to deserve more consideration, but which she has wisely subordinated to an overpowering effect of ensemble. Sarah Bernhardt's acting always reminds me of a musical performance. Her voice is itself an instrument of music, and she plays upon it as a conductor plays upon an orchestra.

One seems to see the expression marks: piano, pianissimo, largamente, and just where the tempo rubato comes in. She never forgets that art is not nature, and that when one is speaking verse one is not talking prose. She speaks with a liquid articulation of every syllable, like one who loves the savour of words on the tongue, giving them a beauty and an expressiveness often not in them themselves. Her face changes less than you might expect; it is not over-possessed by detail, it gives always the synthesis. The smile of the artist, a wonderful smile which has never aged with her, pierces through the passion or languor of the part. It is often accompanied by a suave, voluptuous tossing of the head, and is like the smile of one who inhales some delicious perfume, with half-closed eyes. All through the level perfection of her acting there are little sharp snaps of the nerves; and these are but one indication of that perfect mechanism which her art really is. Her finger is always upon the spring; it touches or releases

it, and the effect follows instantaneously. The movements of her body, her gestures, the expression of her face, are all harmonious, are all parts of a single harmony. It is not reality which she aims at giving us, it is reality transposed into another atmosphere, as if seen in a mirror, in which all its outlines become more gracious. The pleasure which we get from seeing her as Francesca or as Marguerite Gautier is doubled by that other pleasure, never completely out of our minds, that she is also Sarah Bernhardt. One sometimes forgets that Réjane is acting at all; it is the real woman of the part, Sapho, or Zaza, or Yanetta, who lives before us. Also one sometimes forgets that Duse is acting, that she is even pretending to be Magda or Silvia; it is Duse herself who lives there, on the stage. But Sarah Bernhardt is always the actress as well as the part; when she is at her best, she is both equally, and our consciousness of the one does not disturb our possession by the other. When she is not at her best, we see only the actress, the incomparable craftswoman openly labouring at her work.

## COQUELIN AND MOLIÈRE: SOME ASPECTS

To see Coquelin in Molière is to see the greatest of comic actors at his best, and to realise that here is not a temperament, or a student, or anything apart from the art of the actor. His art may be compared with that of Sarah Bernhardt for its infinite care in the training of nature. They have an equal perfection, but it may be said that Coquelin, with his ripe, mellow art, his passion of humour, his touching vehemence, makes himself seem less a divine machine, more a delightfully faulty person. His voice is firm, sonorous, flexible, a human, expressive, amusing voice, not the elaborate musical instrument of Sarah, which seems to go by itself, câline, cooing, lamenting, raging, or in that wonderful swift chatter which she uses with such instant and deliberate effect. And, unlike her, his face is the face of his part, always a disguise, never a revelation.

I have been seeing the three Coquelins and their company at the Garrick Theatre. They did "Tartuffe," "L'Avare," "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," "Les Précieuses Ridicules," and a condensed version of "Le Dépit Amoureux," in which the four acts of the original were cut down into two. Of these five plays only two are in verse, "Tartuffe" and "Le Dépit Amoureux," and I could not help wishing that the fashion of Molière's day had allowed him to write all his plays in prose. Molière was not a poet, and he knew that he was not a poet. When he ventured to write the most Shakespearean of his comedies, "L'Avare," in prose, "le même préjugé," Voltaire tells us, "qui avait fait tomber 'le Festin de Pierre,' parcequ'il était en prose, nuisit au succès de 'l'Avare.' Cependant le public qui, à la longue, se rend toujours au bon, finit par donner à cet ouvrage les applaudissements qu'il mérite. On comprit alors qu'il peut y avoir de fort bonnes comédies en prose." How infinitely finer, as prose, is the prose of "L'Avare" than the verse of "Tartuffe"

as verse! In "Tartuffe" all the art of the actor is required to carry you over the artificial jangle of the alexandrines without allowing you to perceive too clearly that this man, who is certainly not speaking poetry, is speaking in rhyme. Molière was a great prose writer, but I do not remember a line of poetry in the whole of his work in verse. The temper of his mind was the temper of mind of the prose-writer. His wordly wisdom, his active philosophy, the very mainspring of his plots, are found, characteristically, in his valets and his servant-maids. He satirises the miser, the hypocrite, the bas-bleu, but he chuckles over Frosine and Gros-René; he loves them for their freedom of speech and their elastic minds, ready in words or deeds. They are his chorus, if the chorus might be imagined as directing the action.

But Molière has a weakness, too, for the bourgeois, and he has made M. Jourdain immortally delightful. There is not a really cruel touch in the whole character; we laugh at him so freely because Molière lets us

laugh with such kindliness. M. Jourdain has a robust joy in life; he carries off his absurdities by the simple good faith which he puts into them. When I speak of M. Jourdain I hardly know whether I am speaking of the character of Molière or of the character of Coquelin. Probably there is no difference. We get Molière's vast, succulent farce of the intellect rendered with an art like his own. If this, in every detail, is not what Molière meant, then so much the worse for Molière.

Molière is kind to his bourgeois, envelops him softly in satire as in cotton-wool, dandles him like a great baby; and Coquelin is without bitterness, stoops to make stupidity heroic, a distinguished stupidity. A study in comedy so profound, so convincing, so full of human nature and of the art-concealing art of the stage, has not been seen in our time. As Mascarille, in "Les Précieuses Ridicules," Coquelin becomes delicate and extravagant, a scented whirlwind; his parody is more splendid than the thing itself which he parodies, more full of fine

show and nimble bravery. There is beauty in this broadly comic acting, the beauty of subtle detail. Words can do little to define a performance which is a constant series of little movements of the face, little intonations of the voice, a way of lolling in the chair, a way of speaking, of singing, of preserving the gravity of burlesque. In "Tartuffe" we get a form of comedy which is almost tragic, the horribly serious comedy of the hypocrite. Coquelin, who remakes his face, as by a prolonged effort of the muscles, for every part, makes, for this part, a great fish's face, heavy, suppressed, with lowered eyelids and a secret mouth, out of which steals at times some stealthy avowal. He has the movements of a great slug, or of a snail, if you will, putting out its head and drawing it back into its shell. The face waits and plots, with a sleepy immobility, covering a hard, indomitable will. It is like a drawing of Daumier, if you can imagine a drawing which renews itself at every instant, in a series of poses to which it is hardly necessary to add words.

I am told that Coquelin, in the creation of a part, makes his way slowly, surely, inwards, for the first few weeks of his performance, and that then the thing is finished, to the least intonation or gesture, and can be laid down and taken up at will, without a shade of difference in the interpretation. The part of Maître Jacques in "L'Avare," for instance, which I have just seen him perform with such gusto and such certainty, had not been acted by him for twenty years, and it was done, without rehearsal, in the midst of a company that required prompting at every moment. I suppose this method of moulding a part, as if in wet clay, and then allowing it to take hard, final form, is the method natural to the comedian, his right method. I can hardly think that the tragic actor should ever allow himself to become so much at home with his material; that he dare ever allow his clay to become quite hard. He has to deal with the continually shifting stuff of the soul and of the passions, with nature at its least generalised moments. The comic actor deals with

nature for the most part generalised, with things palpably absurd, with characteristics that strike the intelligence, not with emotions that touch the heart or the senses. He comes to more definite and to more definable results, on which he may rest, confident that what has made an audience laugh once will make it laugh always, laughter being a physiological thing, wholly independent of mood.

In thinking of some excellent comic actors of our own, I am struck by the much greater effort which they seem to make in order to drive their points home, and in order to get what they think variety. Sir Charles Wyndham is the only English actor I can think of at the moment who does not make unnecessary grimaces, who does not insist on acting when the difficult thing is not to act. In "Tartuffe" Coquelin stands motionless for five minutes at a time, without change of expression, and yet nothing can be more expressive than his face at those moments. In Chopin's G Minor Nocturne, Op. 15, there is an F held for three bars, and when Rubin-

stein played the Nocturne, says Mr. Huneker in his instructive and delightful book on Chopin, he prolonged the tone, "by some miraculous means," so that "it swelled and diminished, and went singing into D, as if the instrument were an organ." It is that power of sustaining an expression, unchanged, and yet always full of living significance, that I find in Coquelin. It is a part of his economy, the economy of the artist. The improviser disdains economy, as much as the artist cherishes it. Coquelin has some half-dozen complete variations of the face he has composed for Tartuffe; no more than that, with no insignificances of expression thrown away; but each variation is a new point of view, from which we see the whole character.

## RÉJANE

The genius of Réjane is a kind of finesse: it is a flavour, and all the ingredients of the dish may be named without defining it. The thing is Parisian, but that is only to say that it unites nervous force with a wicked ease and mastery of charm. It speaks to the senses through the brain, as much as to the brain through the senses. It is the feminine equivalent of intellect. It "magnetises our poor vertebræ," in Verlaine's phrase, because it is sex and yet not instinct. It is sex civilised, under direction, playing a part, as we say of others than those on the stage. It calculates, and is unerring. It has none of the vulgar warmth of mere passion, none of its health or simplicity. It leaves a little red sting where it has kissed. And it intoxicates us by its appeal to so many sides of our nature at once. We are thrilled, and we admire, and are almost coldly appreciative, and yet aglow with the response of the blood. I

have found myself applauding with tears in my eyes. The feeling and the critical approval came together, hand in hand: neither counteracted the other: and I had to think twice, before I could remember how elaborate a science went to the making of that thrill which I had been almost cruelly enjoying.

The art of Réjane accepts things as they are, without selection or correction; unlike Duse, who chooses just those ways in which she shall be nature. What one remembers are little homely details, in which the shadow of some overpowering impulse gives a sombre beauty to what is common or ugly. She renders the despair of the woman whose lover is leaving her by a single movement, the way in which she wipes her nose. To her there is but one beauty, truth; and but one charm, energy. Where nature has not chosen, she will not choose; she is content with whatever form emotion snatches for itself as it struggles into speech out of an untrained and unconscious body. In "Sapho" she is the everyday "Venus toute

entière à sa proie attachée," and she has all the brutality and all the clinging warmth of the flesh; vice, if you will, but serious vice, vice plus passion. Her sordid, gluttonous, instructed eyes, in which all the passions and all the vices have found a nest, speak their own language, almost without the need of words, throughout the play; the whole face suffers, exults, lies, despairs, with a homely sincerity which cuts more sharply than any stage emphasis. She seems at every moment to throw away her chances of effect, of ordinary stage-effect; then, when the moment seems to have gone, and she has done nothing, you will find that the moment itself has penetrated you, that she has done nothing with genius.

Réjane can be vulgar, as nature is vulgar: she has all the instincts of the human animal, of the animal woman, whom man will never quite civilise. There is no doubt of it, nature lacks taste; and woman, who is so near to nature, lacks taste in the emotions. Réjane, in "Sapho" or in "Zaza" for instance, is woman naked and shameless, loving and suf-

fering with all her nerves and muscles, a gross, pitiable, horribly human thing, whose direct appeal, like that of a sick animal, seizes you by the throat at the instant in which it reaches your eyes and ears. More than any actress she is the human animal without disguise or evasion; with all the instincts, all the natural cries and movements. In "Sapho" or "Zaza" she speaks the language of the senses, no more; and her acting reminds you of all that you may possibly have forgotten of how the senses speak when they speak through an ignorant woman in love. It is like an accusing confirmation of some of one's guesses at truth, before the realities of the flesh and of the affections of the flesh. Scepticism is no longer possible: here, in "Sapho," is a woman who flagellates herself before her lover as the penitent flagellates himself before God. In the scene where her lover repulses her last attempt to win him back, there is a convulsive movement of the body, as she lets herself sink to the ground at his feet, which is like the movement of one who is going to be

sick: it renders, with a ghastly truth to nature, the abject collapse of the body under overpowering emotion. Here, as elsewhere, she gives you merely the thing itself, without a disturbing atom of self-consciousness; she is grotesque, she is what you will: it is no matter. The emotion she is acting possesses her like a blind force; she is Sapho, and Sapho could only move and speak and think in one way. Where Sarah Bernhardt would arrange the emotion for some thrilling effect of art, where Duse would purge the emotion of all its attributes but some fundamental nobility, Réjane takes the big, foolish, dirty thing just as it is. And is not that, perhaps, the supreme merit of acting?

# YVETTE GUILBERT

## I

She is tall, thin, a little angular, most winningly and girlishly awkward, as she wanders on to the stage with an air of vague distraction. Her shoulders droop, her arms hang limply. She doubles forward in an automatic bow in response to the thunders of applause, and that curious smile breaks out along her lips and rises and dances in her bright light-blue eyes, wide open in a sort of child-like astonishment. Her hair, a bright auburn, rises in soft masses above a large, pure forehead. She wears a trailing dress, striped yellow and pink, without ornament. Her arms are covered with long black gloves. The applause stops suddenly; there is a hush of suspense; she is beginning to sing.

And with the first note you realise the difference between Yvette Guilbert and all the rest of the world. A sonnet by Mr. André Raffalovich states just that difference so

subtly that I must quote it to help out my interpretation:

If you want hearty laughter, country mirth—
  Or frantic gestures of an acrobat,
Heels over head—or floating lace skirts worth
  I know not what, a large eccentric hat
And diamonds, the gift of some dull boy—
  Then when you see her do not wrong Yvette,
Because Yvette is not a clever toy,
  A tawdry doll in fairy limelight set . . .
And should her song sound cynical and base
  At first, herself ungainly, or her smile
Monotonous—wait, listen, watch her face:
  The sufferings of those the world calls vile
She sings, and as you watch Yvette Guilbert,
You too will shiver, seeing their despair.

Now to me Yvette Guilbert was exquisite from the first moment. "Exquisite!" I said under my breath, as I first saw her come upon the stage. But it is not merely by her personal charm that she thrills you, though that is strange, perverse, unaccountable.

It is not merely that she can do pure comedy, that she can be frankly, deliciously, gay. There is one of her songs in which she laughs, chuckles, and trills a rapid

flurry of broken words and phrases, with the sudden, spontaneous, irresponsible mirth of a bird. But where she is most herself is in a manner of tragic comedy which has never been seen on the music-hall stage from the beginning. It is the profoundly sad and essentially serious comedy which one sees in Forain's drawings, those rapid outlines which, with the turn of a pencil, give you the whole existence of those base sections of society which our art in England is mainly forced to ignore. People call the art of Forain immoral, they call Yvette Guilbert's songs immoral. That is merely the conventional misuse of a conventional word. The art of Yvette Guilbert is certainly the art of realism. She brings before you the real life-drama of the streets, of the pot-house; she shows you the seamy side of life behind the scenes; she calls things by their right names. But there is not a touch of sensuality about her, she is neither contaminated nor contaminating by what she sings; she is simply a great, impersonal, dramatic artist, who sings realism as others write it.

Her gamut in the purely comic is wide; with an inflection of the voice, a bend of that curious long thin body which seems to be embodied gesture, she can suggest, she can portray, the humour that is dry, ironical, coarse (I will admit), unctuous even. Her voice can be sweet or harsh; it can chirp, lilt, chuckle, stutter; it can moan or laugh, be tipsy or distinguished. Nowhere is she conventional; nowhere does she resemble any other French singer. Voice, face, gestures, pantomime, all are different, all are purely her own. She is a creature of contrasts, and suggests at once all that is innocent and all that is perverse. She has the pure blue eyes of a child, eyes that are cloudless, that gleam with a wicked ingenuousness, that close in the utter abasement of weariness, that open wide in all the expressionlessness of surprise. Her naïveté is perfect, and perfect, too, is that strange, subtle smile of comprehension that closes the period. A great impersonal artist, depending as she does entirely on her expressive power, her dramatic capabilities, her gift for

being moved, for rendering the emotions of those in whom we do not look for just that kind of emotion, she affects one all the time as being, after all, removed from what she sings of; an artist whose sympathy is an instinct, a divination. There is something automatic in all fine histrionic genius, and I find some of the charm of the automaton in Yvette Guilbert. The real woman, one fancies, is the slim bright-haired girl who looks so pleased and so amused when you applaud her, and whom it pleases to please you, just because it is amusing. She could not tell you how she happens to be a great artist; how she has found a voice for the tragic comedy of cities; how it is that she makes you cry when she sings of sordid miseries. "That is her secret," we are accustomed to say; and I like to imagine that it is a secret which she herself has never fathomed.

## II

The difference between Yvette Guilbert and every one else on the music-hall stage is precisely the difference between Sarah

Bernhardt and every one else on the stage of legitimate drama. Elsewhere you may find many admirable qualities, many brilliant accomplishments, but nowhere else that revelation of an extraordinarily interesting personality through the medium of an extraordinarily finished art. Yvette Guilbert has something new to say, and she has discovered a new way of saying it. She has had precursors, but she has eclipsed them. She sings, for instance, songs of Aristide Bruant, songs which he had sung before her, and sung admirably, in his brutal and elaborately careless way. But she has found meanings in them which Bruant, who wrote them, never discovered, or, certainly, could never interpret; she has surpassed him in his own quality, the *macabre;* she has transformed the rough material, which had seemed adequately handled until she showed how much more could be done with it, into something artistically fine and distinguished. And just as, in the brutal and *macabre* style, she has done what Bruant was only trying to do, so, in the style, supposed to be tradition-

ally French, of delicate insinuation, she has invented new shades of expression, she has discovered a whole new method of suggestion. And it is here, perhaps, that the new material which she has known, by some happy instinct, how to lay her hands on, has been of most service to her. She sings, a little cruelly, of the young girl; and the young girl of her songs (that *demoiselle de pensionnat* who is the heroine of one of the most famous of them) is a very different being from the fair abstraction, even rosier and vaguer to the French mind than it is to the English, which stands for the ideal of girlhood. It is, rather, the young girl as Goncourt has rendered her in "Chérie," a creature of awakening, half-unconscious sensations, already at work somewhat abnormally in an anæmic frame, with an intelligence left to feed mainly on itself. And Yvette herself, with her bright hair, the sleepy gold fire of her eyes, her slimness, her gracious awkwardness, her air of delusive innocence, is the very type of the young girl of whom she sings. There is a certain mal-

ice in it all, a malicious insistence on the other side of innocence. But there it is, a new figure; and but one among the creations which we owe to this "comic singer," whose comedy is, for the most part, so serious and so tragic.

For the art of Yvette Guilbert is of that essentially modern kind which, even in a subject supposed to be comic, a subject we are accustomed to see dealt with, if dealt with at all, in burlesque, seeks mainly for the reality of things (and reality, if we get deep enough into it, is never comic), and endeavour to find a new, searching, and poignant expression for that. It is an art concerned, for the most part, with all that part of life which the conventions were intended to hide from us. We see a world where people are very vicious and very unhappy; a sordid, miserable world which it is as well sometimes to consider. It is a side of existence which exists; and to see it is not to be attracted towards it. It is a grey and sordid land, under the sway of "Eros vanné"; it is, for the most part, weary of itself, without rest,

and without escape. This is Yvette Guilbert's domain; she sings it, as no one has ever sung it before, with a tragic realism, touched with a sort of grotesque irony, which is a new thing on any stage. The *rouleuse* of the Quartier Bréda, praying to the one saint in her calendar, "Sainte Galette"; the *soûlarde,* whom the urchins follow and throw stones at in the street; the whole life of the slums and the gutter: these are her subjects, and she brings them, by some marvellous fineness of treatment, into the sphere of art.

It is all a question of *métier,* no doubt, though how far her method is conscious and deliberate it is difficult to say. But she has certain quite obvious qualities, of reticence, of moderation, of suspended emphasis, which can scarcely be other than conscious and deliberate. She uses but few gestures, and these brief, staccato, and for an immediate purpose; her hands, in their long black gloves, are almost motionless, the arms hang limply; and yet every line of the face and body seems alive, alive and repressed. Her

voice can be harsh or sweet, as she would have it, can laugh or cry, be menacing or caressing; it is never used for its own sake, decoratively, but for a purpose, for an effect. And how every word tells! Every word comes to you clearly, carrying exactly its meaning; and, somehow, along with the words, an emotion, which you may resolve to ignore, but which will seize upon you, which will go through and through you. Trick or instinct, there it is, the power to make you feel intensely; and that is precisely the final test of a great dramatic artist.

## SIR HENRY IRVING

As I watched, at the Lyceum, the sad and eager face of Duse, leaning forward out of a box, and gazing at the eager and gentle face of Irving, I could not help contrasting the two kinds of acting summed up in those two faces. The play was "Olivia," W. G. Wills' poor and stagey version of "The Vicar of Wakefield," in which, however, not even the lean intelligence of a modern playwright could quite banish the homely and gracious and tender charm of Goldsmith. As Dr. Primrose, Irving was almost at his best; that is to say, not at his greatest, but at his most equable level of good acting. All his distinction was there, his nobility, his restraint, his fine convention. For Irving represents the old school of acting, just as Duse represents the new school. To Duse, acting is a thing almost wholly apart from action; she thinks on the stage, scarcely moves there; when she feels emotion, it is her chief care

not to express it with emphasis, but to press it down into her soul, until only the pained reflection of it glimmers out of her eyes and trembles in the hollows of her cheeks. To Irving, on the contrary, acting is all that the word literally means; it is an art of sharp, detached, yet always delicate movement; he crosses the stage with intention, as he intentionally adopts a fine, crabbed, personal, highly conventional elocution of his own; he is an actor, and he acts, keeping nature, or the too close resemblance of nature, carefully out of his composition.

With Miss Terry there is permanent charm of a very natural nature, which has become deliciously sophisticated. She is the eternal girl, and she can never grow old; one might say, she can never grow up. She learns her part, taking it quite artificially, as a part to be learnt; and then, at her frequent moments of forgetfulness, charms us into delight, though not always into conviction, by a gay abandonment to the self of a passing moment. Irving's acting is almost a science, and it is a science founded on tradi-

tion. It is in one sense his personality that makes him what he is, the only actor on the English stage who has a touch of genius. But he has not gone to himself to invent an art wholly personal, wholly new; his acting is no interruption of an intense inner life, but a craftsmanship into which he has put all he has to give. It is an art wholly of rhetoric, that is to say wholly external; his emotion moves to slow music, crystallises into an attitude, dies upon a long-drawn-out word. He appeals to us, to our sense of what is expected, to our accustomed sense of the logic, not of life, but of life as we have always seen it on the stage, by his way of taking snuff, of taking out his pocket-handkerchief, of lifting his hat, of crossing his legs. He has observed life in order to make his own version of life, using the stage as his medium, and accepting the traditional aids and limitations of the stage.

Take him in one of his typical parts, in "Louis XI." His Louis XI. is a masterpiece of grotesque art. It is a study in senility, and it is the grotesque art of the thing

which saves it from becoming painful. This shrivelled carcase, from which age, disease, and fear have picked all the flesh, leaving the bare framework of bone and the drawn and cracked covering of yellow skin, would be unendurable in its irreverent copy of age if it were not so obviously a picture, with no more malice than there is in the delicate lines and fine colours of a picture. The figure is at once Punch and the oldest of the Chelsea pensioners; it distracts one between pity, terror, and disgust, but is altogether absorbing; one watches it as one would watch some feeble ancient piece of mechanism, still working, which may snap at any moment. In such a personation, make-up becomes a serious part of art. It is the picture that magnetises us, and every wrinkle seems to have been studied in movement; the hands act almost by themselves, as if every finger were a separate actor. The passion of fear, the instinct of craft, the malady of suspicion, in a frail old man who has power over every one but himself: that is what Sir Henry Irving represents, in a performance

which is half precise physiology, half palpable artifice, but altogether a unique thing in art.

See him in "The Merchant of Venice." His Shylock is noble and sordid, pathetic and terrifying. It is one of his great parts, made up of pride, stealth, anger, minute and varied picturesqueness, and a diabolical subtlety. Whether he paws at his cloak, or clutches upon the handle of his stick, or splutters hatred, or cringes before his prey, or shakes with lean and wrinkled laughter, he is always the great part and the great actor. See him as Mephistopheles in "Faust." The Lyceum performance was a superb pantomime, with one overpowering figure drifting through it and in some sort directing it, the red-plumed devil Mephistopheles, who, in Sir Henry Irving's impersonation of him, becomes a kind of weary spirit, a melancholy image of unhappy pride, holding himself up to the laughter of inferior beings, with the old acknowledgment that "the devil is an ass." A head like the head of Dante, shown up by coloured lights, and against chromo-

lithographic backgrounds, while all the diabolic intelligence is set to work on the cheap triumph of wheedling a widow and screwing Rhenish and Tokay with a gimlet out of an inn table: it is partly Goethe's fault, and partly the fault of Wills, and partly the lowering trick of the stage. Mephistopheles is not really among Irving's great parts, but it is among his picturesque parts. With his restless strut, a blithe and aged tripping of the feet to some not quite human measure, he is like some spectral marionette, playing a game only partly his own. In such a part no mannerism can seem unnatural, and the image with its solemn mask lives in a kind of galvanic life of its own, seductively, with some mocking suggestion of his "cousin the snake." Here and there some of the old power may be lacking; but whatever was once subtle and insinuating remains.

Shakespeare at the Lyceum is always a magnificent spectacle, and "Coriolanus," the last Shakespearean revival there, was a magnificent spectacle. It is a play made up principally of one character and a crowd, the

crowd being a sort of moving background, treated in Shakespeare's large and scornful way. A stage crowd at the Lyceum always gives one a sense of exciting movement, and this Roman rabble did all that was needed to show off the almost solitary splendour of Coriolanus. He is the proudest man in Shakespeare, and Sir Henry Irving is at his best when he embodies pride. His conception of the part was masterly; it had imagination, nobility, quietude. With opportunity for ranting in every second speech, he never ranted, but played what might well have been a roaring part with a kind of gentleness. With every opportunity for extravagant gesture, he stood, as the play seemed to foam about him, like a rock against which the foam beats. Made up as a kind of Roman Moltke, the lean, thoughtful soldier, he spoke throughout with a slow, contemptuous enunciation, as of one only just not too lofty to sneer. Restrained in scorn, he kept throughout an attitude of disdainful pride, the face, the eyes, set, while only his mouth twitched, seeming to chew his

words, with the disgust of one swallowing a painful morsel. Where other actors would have raved, he spoke with bitter humour, a humour that seemed to hurt the speaker, the concise, active humour of the soldier, putting his words rapidly into deeds. And his pride was an intellectual pride; the weakness of a character, but the angry dignity of a temperament. I have never seen Irving so restrained, so much an artist, so faithfully interpretative of a masterpiece. Something of energy, no doubt, was lacking; but everything was there, except the emphasis which I most often wish away in acting.

# DUSE IN SOME OF HER PARTS

## I

THE acting of Duse is a criticism; poor work dissolves away under it, as under a solvent acid. Not one of the plays which she has brought with her is a play on the level of her intelligence and of her capacity for expressing deep human emotion. Take "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." It is a very able play, it is quite an interesting glimpse into a particular kind of character, but it is only able, and it is only a glimpse. Paula, as conceived by Mr. Pinero, is a thoroughly English type of woman, the nice, slightly morbid, somewhat unintelligently capricious woman who has "gone wrong," and who finds it quite easy, though a little dull, to go right when the chance is offered to her. She is observed from the outside, very keenly observed; her ways, her surface tricks of emotion, are caught; she is a person whom we

know or remember. But what is skin-deep in Paula as conceived by Mr. Pinero becomes a real human being, a human being with a soul, in the Paula conceived by Duse. Paula as played by Duse is sad and sincere, where the Englishwoman is only irritable; she has the Italian simplicity and directness in place of that terrible English capacity for uncertainty in emotion and huffiness in manner. She brings profound tragedy, the tragedy of a soul which has sinned and suffered, and tries vainly to free itself from the consequences of its deeds, into a study of circumstances in their ruin of material happiness. And, frankly, the play cannot stand it. When this woman bows down under her fate in so terrible a spiritual loneliness, realising that we cannot fight against Fate, and that Fate is only the inevitable choice of our own natures, we wait for the splendid words which shall render so great a situation; and no splendid words come. The situation, to the dramatist, has been only a dramatic situation. Here is Duse, a chalice for the wine of imagination, but the chalice remains

empty. It is almost painful to see her waiting for the words that do not come, offering tragedy to us in her eyes, and with her hands, and in her voice, only not in the words that she says or in the details of the action which she is condemned to follow.

See Mrs. Patrick Campbell playing "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," and you will see it played exactly according to Mr. Pinero's intention, and played brilliantly enough to distract our notice from what is lacking in the character. A fantastic and delightful contradiction, half gamine, half Burne-Jones, she confuses our judgment, as a Paula in real life might, and leaves us attracted and repelled, and, above all, interested. But Duse has no resources outside simple human nature. If she cannot convince you by the thing in itself, she cannot disconcert you by a paradox about it. Well, this passionately sincere acting, this one real person moving about among the dolls of the piece, shows up all that is mechanical, forced, and unnatural in the construction of a play never meant to withstand the searchlight of

this woman's creative intelligence. Whatever is theatrical and obvious starts out into sight. The good things are transfigured, the bad things merely discovered. And so, by a kind of naïveté in the acceptance of emotion for all it might be, instead of for the little that it is, by an almost perverse simplicity and sincerity in the treatment of a superficial and insincere character, Duse plays "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" in the grand manner, destroying the illusion of the play as she proves over again the supremacy of her own genius.

## II

While I watch Duse's Magda, I can conceive, for the time, of no other. Realising the singer as being just such an artist as herself, she plays the part with hardly a suggestion of the stage, except the natural woman's intermittent loathing for it. She has been a great artist; yes, but that is nothing to her. "I am I," as she says, and she has lived. And we see before us, all through the play, a woman who has lived with all her capacity for joy and sorrow, who has thought with all

her capacity for seeing clearly what she is unable, perhaps, to help doing. She does not act, that is, explain herself to us, emphasise herself for us. She lets us overlook her, with a supreme unconsciousness, a supreme affectation of unconsciousness, which is of course very conscious art, an art so perfect as to be almost literally deceptive. I do not know if she plays with exactly the same gestures night after night, but I can quite imagine it. She has certain little caresses, the half awkward caresses of real people, not the elegant curves and convolutions of the stage, which always enchant me beyond any mimetic movements I have ever seen. She has a way of letting her voice apparently get beyond her own control, and of looking as if emotion has left her face expressionless, as it often leaves the faces of real people, thus carrying the illusion of reality almost further than it is possible to carry it, only never quite.

I was looking this afternoon at Whistler's portrait of Carlyle at the Guildhall, and I find in both the same final art: that art of perfect expression, perfect suppression, per-

fect balance of every quality, so that a kind of negative thing becomes a thing of the highest achievement. Name every fault to which the art of the actor is liable, and you will have named every fault which is lacking in Duse. And the art of the actor is in itself so much a compound of false emphasis and every kind of wilful exaggeration, that to have any negative merit is to have already a merit very positive. Having cleared away all that is not wanted, Duse begins to create. And she creates out of life itself an art which no one before her had ever imagined: not realism, not a copy, but the thing itself, the evocation of thoughtful life, the creation of the world over again, as actual and beautiful a thing as if the world had never existed.

## III

"La Gioconda" is the first play in which Duse has had beautiful words to speak, and a poetical conception of character to render; and her acting in it is more beautiful and more poetical than it was possible for it to be in "Magda," or in "The Second Mrs. Tan-

queray." But the play is not a good play; at its best it is lyrical rather than dramatic, and at its worst it is horrible with a vulgar material horror. The end of "Titus Andronicus" is not so revolting as the end of "La Gioconda." D'Annunzio has put as a motto on his title-page the sentence of Leonardo da Vinci: "Cosa bella mortal passa, e non d'arte," and the action of the play is intended as a symbol of the possessing and destroying mastery of art and of beauty. But the idea is materialised into a form of grotesque horror, and all the charm of the atmosphere and the grace of the words cannot redeem a conclusion so inartistic in its painfulness. But, all the same, the play is the work of a poet, it brings imagination upon the stage, and it gives Duse an opportunity of being her finest self. All the words she speaks are sensitive words, she moves in the midst of beautiful things, her whole life seems to flow into a more harmonious rhythm, for all the violence of its sorrow and suffering. Her acting at the end, all through the inexcusable brutality of the scene in which she appears

before us with her mutilated hands covered under long hanging sleeves, is, in the dignity, intensity, and humanity of its pathos, a thing of beauty, of a profound kind of beauty, made up of pain, endurance, and the irony of pitiable things done in vain. Here she is no longer transforming a foreign conception of character into her own conception of what character should be; she is embodying the creation of an Italian, of an artist, and a creation made in her honour. D'Annunzio's tragedy is, in the final result, bad tragedy, but it is a failure of a far higher order than such successes as Mr. Pinero's. It is written with a consciousness of beauty, with a feverish energy which is still energy, with a sense of what is imaginative in the facts of actual life. It is written in Italian which is a continual delight to the ear, prose which sounds as melodious as verse, prose to which, indeed, all dramatic probability is sacrificed. And Duse seems to acquire a new subtlety, as she speaks at last words in themselves worthy of her speaking. It is as if she at last spoke her own language.

## IV

Dumas fils has put his best work into the novel of "La Dame aux Camélias," which is a kind of slighter, more superficial, more sentimental, more modern, but less universal "Manon Lescaut." There is a certain artificial, genuinely artificial, kind of nature in it: if not "true to life," it is true to certain lives. But the play lets go this hold, such as it is, on reality, and becomes a mere stage convention as it crosses the footlights; a convention which is touching, indeed, far too full of pathos, human in its exaggerated way, but no longer to be mistaken, by the least sensitive of hearers, for great or even fine literature. And the sentiment in it is not so much human as French, a factitious idealism in depravity which one associates peculiarly with Paris. Marguerite Gautier is the type of the nice woman who sins and loves, and becomes regenerated by an unnatural kind of self-sacrifice, done for French family reasons. She is the Parisian whom Sarah Bernhardt impersonates perfectly in that hysterical and yet deliberate

manner which is made for such impersonations. Duse, as she does always, turns her into quite another kind of woman; not the light woman, to whom love has come suddenly, as a new sentiment coming suddenly into her life, but the simple, instinctively loving woman, in whom we see nothing of the demi-monde, only the natural woman in love. Throughout the play she has moments, whole scenes, of absolute greatness, as fine as anything she has ever done: but there are other moments when she seems to carry repression too far. Her pathos, as in the final scene, and at the end of the scene of the reception, where she repeats the one word "Armando" over and over again, in an amazed and agonising reproachfulness, is of the finest order of pathos. She appeals to us by a kind of goodness, much deeper than the sentimental goodness intended by Dumas. It is love itself that she gives us, love utterly unconscious of anything but itself, uncontaminated, unspoilt. She is Mlle. de Lespinasse rather than Marguerite Gautier; a creature in whom ardour is as simple as

breath, and devotion a part of ardour. Her physical suffering is scarcely to be noticed; it is the suffering of her soul that Duse gives us. And she gives us this as if nature itself came upon the boards, and spoke to us without even the ordinary disguise of human beings in their intercourse with one another. Once more an artificial play becomes sincere; once more the personality of a great impersonal artist dominates the poverty of her part; we get one more revelation of a particular phase of Duse. And it would be unreasonable to complain that "La Dame aux Camélias" is really something quite different, something much inferior; here we have at least a great emotion, a desperate sincerity, with all the thoughtfulness which can possibly accompany passion.

## V

Dumas, in a preface better than his play, tells us that "La Princesse Georges" is "a Soul in conflict with Instincts." But no, as he has drawn her, as he has placed her, she is only the theory of a woman in conflict

with the mechanical devices of a plot. All these characters talk as they have been taught, and act according to the tradition of the stage. It is a double piece of mechanism, that is all; there is no creation of character, there is a kind of worldly wisdom throughout, but not a glimmer of imagination; argument drifts into sentiment, and sentiment returns into argument, without conviction; the end is no conclusion, but an arbitrary break in an action which we see continuing, after the curtain has fallen. And, as in "Fédora," Duse comes into the play resolved to do what the author has not done. Does she deliberately choose the plays most obviously not written for her in order to extort a triumph out of her enemies? Once more she acts consciously, openly, making every moment of an unreal thing real, by concentrating herself upon every moment as if it were the only one. The result is a performance miraculous in detail, and, if detail were everything, it would be a great part. With powdered hair, she is beautiful and a great lady; as the domesticated princess, she has

all the virtues, and honesty itself, in her face and in her movements; she gives herself with a kind of really unreflecting thoughtfulness to every sentiment which is half her emotion. If such a woman could exist, and she could not, she would be that, precisely that. But just as we are beginning to believe, not only in her but in the play itself, in comes the spying lady's maid, or the valet who spies on the lady's maid, and we are in melodrama again, and among the strings of the marionettes. Where are the three stages, truth, philosophy, conscience, which Dumas offers to us in his preface as the three stages by which a work of dramatic art reaches perfection? Shown us by Duse, from moment to moment, yes; but in the piece, no, scarcely more than in "Fédora." So fatal is it to write for our instruction, as fatal as to write for our amusement. A work of art must suggest everything, but it must prove nothing. Bad imaginative work like "La Gioconda" is really, in its way, better than this unimaginative and theoretical falseness to life; for it at least

shows us beauty, even though it degrades that beauty before our eyes. And Duse, of all actresses the nearest to nature, was born to create beauty, that beauty which is the deepest truth of natural things. Why does she after all only tantalise us, showing us little fragments of her soul under many disguises, but never giving us her whole self through the revealing medium of a masterpiece?

## VI

"Fédora" is a play written for Sarah Bernhardt by the writer of plays for Sarah Bernhardt, and it contains the usual ingredients of that particular kind of scorcery: a Russian tigress, an assassination, a suicide, exotic people with impulses in conflict with their intentions, good working evil and evil working good, not according to a philosophical idea, but for the convenience of a melodramatic plot. As artificial, as far from life on the one hand and poetry on the other, as a jig of marionettes at the end of a string, it has the absorbing momentary interest of a problem in events. Character does not

exist, only impulse and event. And Duse comes into this play with a desperate resolve to fill it with honest emotion, to be what a woman would really perhaps be if life turned melodramatic with her. Visibly, deliberately, she acts: "Fédora" is not to be transformed unawares into life. But her acting is like that finest kind of acting which we meet with in real life, when we are able to watch some choice scene of the human comedy being played before us. She becomes the impossible thing that Fédora is, and, in that tour de force, she does some almost impossible things by the way. There is a scene in which the blood fades out of her cheeks until they seem to turn to dry earth furrowed with wrinkles. She makes triumphant point after triumphant point (her intelligence being free to act consciously on this unintelligent matter), and we notice, more than in her finer parts, individual movements, gestures, tones: the attitude of her open hand upon a door, certain blind caresses with her fingers as they cling for the last time to her lover's cheeks, her face as

she reads a letter, the art of her voice as she almost deliberately takes us in with these emotional artifices of Sardou. When it is all over, and we think of the Silvia of "La Gioconda," of the woman we divine under Magda and under Paula Tanqueray, it is with a certain sense of waste; for even Paula can be made to seem something which Fédora can never be made to seem. In "Fédora" we have a sheer, undisguised piece of stage-craft, without even the amount of psychological intention of Mr. Pinero, much less of Sudermann. It is a detective story with horrors, and it is far too positive and finished a thing to be transformed into something not itself. Sardou is a hard taskmaster; he chains his slaves. Without nobility or even coherence of conception, without inner life or even a recognisable semblance of exterior life, the piece goes by clockwork; you cannot make the hands go faster or slower, or bring its mid-day into agreement with the sun. A great actress, who is also a great intelligence, is seen accepting it, for its purpose, with contempt, as a thing to exercise her technical

skill upon. As a piece of technical skill, Duse's acting in "Fédora" is as fine as anything she has done. It completes our admiration of her genius, as it proves to us that she can act to perfection a part in which the soul is left out of the question, in which nothing happens according to nature, and in which life is figured as a long attack of nerves, relieved by the occasional interval of an uneasy sleep.

# ANNOTATIONS BY THE WAY

## I. "PELLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE"

"PELLÉAS AND MÉLISANDE" is the most beautiful of Maeterlinck's plays, and to say this is to say that it is the most beautiful contemporary play. Maeterlinck's theatre of marionettes, who are at the same time children and spirits, at once more simple and more abstract than real people, is the reaction of the imagination against the wholly prose theatre of Ibsen, into which life comes nakedly, cruelly, subtly, but without distinction, without poetry. Maeterlinck has invented plays which are pictures, in which the crudity of action is subdued into misty outlines. People with strange names, living in impossible places, where there are only woods and fountains, and towers by the seashore, and ancient castles, where there are no towns, and where the common crowd of the world is shut out of sight and hearing,

move like quiet ghosts across the stage, mysterious to us and not less mysterious to one another. They are all lamenting because they do not know, because they cannot understand, because their own souls are so strange to them, and each other's souls like pitiful enemies, giving deadly wounds unwillingly. They are always in dread, because they know that nothing is certain in the world or in their own hearts, and they know that love most often does the work of hate and that hate is sometimes tenderer than love. In "Pelléas and Mélisande" we have two innocent lovers, to whom love is guilt; we have blind vengeance, aged and helpless wisdom; we have the conflict of passions fighting in the dark, destroying what they desire most in the world. And out of this tragic tangle Maeterlinck has made a play which is too full of beauty to be painful. We feel an exquisite sense of pity, so impersonal as to be almost healing, as if our own sympathy had somehow set right the wrongs of the play.

And this play, translated with delicate

fidelity by Mr. Mackail, has been acted again by Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Mr. Martin Harvey, to the accompaniment of M. Fauré's music, and in the midst of scenery which gave a series of beautiful pictures, worthy of the play. Mrs. Campbell, in whose art there is so much that is pictorial, has never been so pictorial as in the character of Mélisande. At the beginning I thought she was acting with more effort and less effect than in the original performance; but as the play went on she abandoned herself more and more simply to the part she was acting, and in the death scene had a kind of quiet, poignant, reticent perfection. A plaintive figure out of tapestry, a child out of a nursery tale, she made one feel at once the remoteness and the humanity of this waif of dreams, the little princess who does know that it is wrong to love. In the great scene by the fountain in the park, Mrs. Campbell expressed the supreme unconsciousness of passion, both in face and voice, as no other English actress could have done; in the death scene she ex-

pressed the supreme unconsciousness of innocence with the same beauty and the same intensity. Her palpitating voice, in which there is something like the throbbing of a wounded bird, seemed to speak the simple and beautiful words as if they had never been said before. And that beauty and strangeness in her, which make her a work of art in herself, seemed to find the one perfect opportunity for their expression. The only actress on our stage whom we go to see as we would go to see a work of art, she acts Pinero and the rest as if under a disguise. Here, dressed in wonderful clothes of no period, speaking delicate, almost ghostly words, she is herself, her rarer self. And Mr. Martin Harvey, who can be so simple, so passionate, so full of the warmth of charm, seemed until almost the end of the play to have lost the simple fervour which he had once shown in the part of Pelléas; he posed, spoke without sincerity, was conscious of little but his attitudes. But in the great love scene by the fountain in the park he had recovered sincerity, he forgot him-

self, remembering Pelléas: and that great love scene was acted with a sense of the poetry and a sense of the human reality of the thing, as no one on the London stage but Mr. Harvey and Mrs. Campbell could have acted it. No one else, except Mr. Arliss as the old servant, was good; the acting was not sufficiently monotonous, with that fine monotony which is part of the secret of Maeterlinck. These busy actors occupied themselves in making points, instead of submitting passively to the passing through them of profound emotions, and the betrayal of these emotions in a few, reticent, and almost unwilling words.

### II. "EVERYMAN"

The Elizabethan Stage Society's performance of "Everyman" deserves a place of its own among the stage performances of our time. "Everyman" took one into a kind of very human church, a church in the midst of the market-place, like those churches in Italy, in which people seem so much at home. The verse is quaint, homely, not so

archaic when it is spoken as one might suppose in reading it; the metre is regular in beat, but very irregular in the number of syllables, and the people who spoke it so admirably under Mr. Poel's careful training had not been trained to scan it as well as they articulated it. "Everyman" is a kind of "Pilgrim's Progress," conceived with a daring and reverent imagination, so that God himself comes quite naturally upon the stage, and speaks out of a clothed and painted image. Death, lean and bare-boned, rattles his drum and trips fantastically across the stage of the earth, leading his dance; Everyman is seen on his way to the grave, taking leave of Riches, Fellowship, Kindred, and Goods (each personified with his attributes), escorted a little way by Strength, Discretion, Beauty, and the Five Wits, and then abandoned by them, and then going down into the grave with no other attendance than that of Knowledge and Good Deeds. The pathos and sincerity of the little drama were shown finely and adequately by the simple cloths and bare boards

of a Shakespearean stage, and by the solemn chanting of the actors and their serious, unspoilt simplicity in acting. Miss Wynne-Matthison in the part of Everyman acted with remarkable power and subtlety; she had the complete command of her voice, as so few actors or actresses have, and she was able to give vocal expression to every shade of meaning which she had apprehended.

### III. "FAUST" AT THE LYCEUM

In the version of "Faust" given by Irving at the Lyceum, Wills did his best to follow the main lines of Goethe's construction. Unfortunately he was less satisfied with Goethe's verse, though it happens that the verse is distinctly better than the construction. He kept the shell and threw away the kernel. Faust becomes insignificant in this play to which he gives his name. In Goethe he was a thinker, even more than a poet. Here he speaks bad verse full of emptiness. Even where Goethe's words are followed, in a literal translation, the meaning seems to have gone out of them; they are displaced,

they no longer count for anything. The Walpurgis Night is stripped of all its poetry, and Faust's study is emptied of all its wisdom. The Witches' Kitchen brews messes without magic, lest the gallery should be bewildered. The part of Martha is extended, in order that his red livery may have its full "comic relief." Mephistopheles throws away a good part of his cunning wit, in order that he may shock no prejudices by seeming to be cynical with seriousness, and in order to get in some more than indifferent spectral effect. Margaret is to be seen full length; the little German soubrette does her best to be the Helen Faust takes her for; and we are meant to be profoundly interested in the love-story. "Most of all," the programme assures us, Wills "strove to tell the love-story in a manner that might appeal to an English-speaking audience."

Now if you take the philosophy and the poetry out of Goethe's "Faust," and leave the rest, it does not seem to me that you leave the part which is best worth having. In writing the First Part of "Faust" Goethe

made free use of the legend of Dr. Faustus, not always improving that legend where he departed from it. If we turn to Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" we shall see, embedded among chaotic fragments of mere rubbish and refuse, the outlines of a far finer, a far more poetic, conception of the legend. Marlowe's imagination was more essentially a poetic imagination than Goethe's, and he was capable, at moments, of more satisfying dramatic effects. When his Faustus says to Mephistopheles:

> One thing, good servant, let me crave of thee,
> To glut the longing of my heart's desire:
> That I may have unto my paramour
> That heavenly Helen which I saw of late;

and when, his prayer being granted, he cries:

> Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
> And burned the topless towers of Ilium?

he is a much more splendid and significant person than the Faust of Goethe, who needs the help of the devil and of an old woman to seduce a young girl who has fallen in love with him at first sight. Goethe, it is true,

made what amends he could afterwards, in the Second Part, when much of the impulse had gone and all the deliberation in the world was not active enough to replace it. Helen has her share, among other abstractions, but the breath has not returned into her body, she is glacial, a talking enigma, to whom Marlowe's Faustus would never have said with the old emphasis:

> And none but thou shalt be my paramour!

What remains, then, in Wills' version, is the Gretchen story, in all its detail, a spectacular representation of the not wholly sincere witchcraft, and the impressive outer shell of Mephistopheles, with, in Sir Henry Irving's pungent and acute rendering, something of the real savour of the denying spirit. Mephistopheles is the modern devil, the devil of culture and polite negation; the comrade, in part the master, of Heine, and perhaps the grandson and pupil of Voltaire. On the Lyceum stage he is the one person of distinction, the one intelligence; though so many of his best words have been taken

from him, it is with a fine subtlety that he says the words that remain. And the figure, with its lightness, weary grace, alert and uneasy step, solemnity, grim laughter, remains with one, after one has come away and forgotten whether he told us all that Goethe confided to him.

### IV. THE JAPANESE PLAYERS

When I first saw the Japanese players I suddenly discovered the meaning of Japanese art, so far as it represents human beings. You know the scarcely human oval which represents a woman's face, with the help of a few thin curves for eyelids and mouth. Well, that convention, as I had always supposed it to be, that geometrical symbol of a face, turns out to be precisely the face of the Japanese woman when she is made up. So the monstrous entanglements of men fighting, which one sees in the pictures, the circling of the two-handed sword, the violence of feet in combat, are seen to be after all the natural manner of Japanese warfare. This unrestrained

energy of body comes out in the expression of every motion. Men spit and sneeze and snuffle, without consciousness of dignity or hardly of humanity, under the influence of fear, anger, or astonishment. When the merchant is awaiting Shylock's knife he trembles convulsively, continuously, from head to feet, unconscious of everything but death. When Shylock has been thwarted, he stands puckering his face into a thousand grimaces, like a child who has swallowed medicine. It is the emotion of children, naked sensation, not yet clothed by civilisation. Only the body speaks in it, the mind is absent; and the body abandons itself completely to the animal force of its instincts. With a great artist like Sada Yacco in the death scene of "The Geisha and the Knight," the effect is overwhelming; the whole woman dies before one's sight, life ebbs visibly out of cheeks and eyes and lips; it is death as not even Sarah Bernhardt has shown us death. There are moments, at other times and with other performers, when it is difficult not to laugh at some cat-like

or ape-like trick of these painted puppets who talk a toneless language, breathing through their words as they whisper or chant them. They are swathed like barbaric idols, in splendid robes without grace; they dance with fans, with fingers, running, hopping, lifting their feet, if they lift them, with the heavy delicacy of the elephant; they sing in discords, striking or plucking a few hoarse notes on stringed instruments, and beating on untuned drums. Neither they nor their clothes have beauty, to the limited Western taste; they have strangeness, the charm of something which seems to us capricious, almost outside Nature. In our ignorance of their words, of what they mean to one another, of the very way in which they see one another, we shall best appreciate their rarity by looking on them frankly as pictures, which we can see with all the imperfections of a Western misunderstanding.

### V. THE PARIS MUSIC-HALL

It is not always realised by Englishmen that England is really the country of the music-hall, the only country where it has

taken firm root and flowered elegantly. There is nothing in any part of Europe to compare, in their own way, with the Empire and the Alhambra, either as places luxurious in themselves or as places where a brilliant spectacle is to be seen. It is true that, in England, the art of the ballet has gone down; the prima ballerina assoluta is getting rare, the primo uomo is extinct. The training of dancers as dancers leaves more and more to be desired, but that is a defect which we share, at the present time, with most other countries; while the beauty of the spectacle, with us, is unique. Think of "Les Papillons" or of "Old China" at the Empire, and then go and see a fantastic ballet at Paris, at Vienna, or at Berlin!

And it is not only in regard to the ballet, but in regard also to the "turns," that we are ahead of all our competitors. I have no great admiration for most of our comic gentlemen and ladies in London, but I find it still more difficult to take any interest in the comic gentlemen and ladies

of Paris. Take Marie Lloyd, for instance, and compare with her, say, Marguerite Deval at the Scala. Both aim at much the same effect, but, contrary to what might have been expected, it is the Englishwoman who shows the greater finesse in the rendering of that small range of sensations to which both give themselves up frankly. Take Polin, who is supposed to express vulgarities with unusual success. Those automatic gestures, flapping and flopping; that dribbling voice, without intonation; that flabby droop and twitch of the face; all that soapy rubbing-in of the expressive parts of the song: I could see no skill in it all, of a sort worth having. The women here sing mainly with their shoulders, for which they seem to have been chosen, and which are undoubtedly expressive. Often they do not even take the trouble to express anything with voice or face; the face remains blank, the voice trots creakily. It is a doll who repeats its lesson, holding itself up to be seen.

The French "revue," as one sees it at the Folies-Bergère, done somewhat roughly

and sketchily, strikes one most of all by its curious want of consecution, its entire reliance on the point of this or that scene, costume, or performer. It has no plan, no idea; some ideas are flung into it in passing; but it remains as shapeless as an English pantomime, and not much more interesting. Both appeal to the same undeveloped instincts, the English to a merely childish vulgarity, the French to a vulgarity which is more frankly vicious. Really I hardly know which is to be preferred. In England we pretend that fancy dress is all in the interests of morality; in France they make no such pretence, and, in dispensing with shoulder-straps, do but make their intentions a little clearer. Go to the Moulin-Rouge and you will see a still clearer object-lesson. The goods in the music-halls are displayed so to speak, behind glass, in a shop window; at the Moulin-Rouge they are on the open booths of a street market.

## M. CAPUS IN ENGLAND

An excellent Parisian company from the Variétés has been playing "La Veine" of M. Alfred Capus, and this week it is playing "Les Deux Ecoles" of the same entertaining writer. The company is led by Mme. Jeanne Granier, an actress who could not be better in her own way unless she acquired a touch of genius, and she has no genius. She was thoroughly and consistently good, she was lifelike, amusing, never out of key; only, while she reminded one at times of Réjane, she had none of Réjane's magnetism, none of Réjane's exciting naturalness.

The whole company is one of excellent quality, which goes together like the different parts of a piece of machinery. There is Mme. Marie Magnier, so admirable as an old lady of that good, easy-going, intelligent, French type. There is Mlle. Laval-

lière, with her brilliant eyes and her little canaille voice, vulgarly exquisite. There is M. Numès, M. Guy, M. Guitry. M. Guitry is the French equivalent of Mr. Fred Kerr, with all the difference that that change of nationality means. His slow manner, his delaying pantomine, his hard, persistent eyes, his uninflected voice, made up a type which I have never seen more faithfully presented on the stage. And there is M. Brasseur. He is a kind of French Arthur Roberts, but without any of that extravagant energy which carries the English comedian triumphantly through all his absurdities. M. Brasseur is preposterously natural, full of aplomb and impertinence. He never flags, never hesitates; it is impossible to take him seriously, as we say of delightful, mischievous people in real life.

I have been amused to see a discussion in the papers as to whether "La Veine" is a fit play to be presented to the English public. "Max" has defended it in his own way in the *Saturday Review,* and I hasten to say that I quite agree with his defence. Above

all, I agree with him when he says: "Let our dramatic critics reserve their indignation for those other plays in which the characters are self-conscious, winkers and gigglers over their own misconduct, taking us into their confidence, and inviting us to wink and giggle with them." There, certainly, is the offence; there is a kind of vulgarity which seems native to the lower English mind and to the lower English stage. M. Capus is not a moralist, but it is not needful to be a moralist. He is a skilful writer for the stage, who takes an amiable, somewhat superficial, quietly humorous view of things, and he takes people as he finds them in a particular section of the upper and lower middle classes in Paris, not going further than the notion which they have of themselves, and presenting that simply, without comment. We get a foolish young millionaire and a foolish young person in a flower shop, who take up a collage together in the most casual way possible, and they are presented as two very ordinary people, neither better nor worse than a great many other

ordinary people, who do or do not do much the same thing. They at least do not "wink or giggle"; they take things with the utmost simplicity, and they call upon us to imitate their bland unconsciousness.

"La Veine" is a study of luck, in the person of a very ordinary man, not more intelligent or more selfish or more attractive than the average, but one who knows when to take the luck which comes his way. The few, quite average, incidents of the play are put together with neatness and probability, and without sensational effects, or astonishing curtains; the people are very natural and probable, very amusing in their humours, and they often say humorous things, not in so many set words, but by a clever adjustment of natural and probable nothings. Throughout the play there is an amiable and entertaining common sense which never becomes stage convention; these people talk like real people, only much more à-propos.

In "Les Deux Ecoles" the philosophy which could be discerned in "La Veine," that

of taking things as they are and taking them comfortably, is carried to a still further development. I am prepared to be told that the whole philosophy is horribly immoral; perhaps it is; but the play, certainly, is not. It is vastly amusing, its naughtiness is so naïve, so tactfully frank, that even the American daughter might take her mother to see it, without fear of corrupting the innocence of age. "On peut très bien vivre sans être la plus heureuse des femmes": that is one of the morals of the piece; and, the more you think over questions of conduct, the more you realise that you might just as well not have thought about them at all, might be another. The incidents by which these excellent morals are driven home are incidents of the same order as those in "La Veine," and not less entertaining. The mounting, simple as it was, was admirably planned; the stage-pictures full of explicit drollery. And, as before, the whole company worked with the effortless unanimity of a perfect piece of machinery.

A few days after seeing "La Veine" I

went to Wyndham's Theatre to see a revival of Sir Francis Burnand's "Betsy." "Betsy," of course, is adapted from the French, though, by an accepted practice which seems to me dishonest, in spite of its acceptance, that fact is not mentioned on the play-bill. But the form is undoubtedly English, very English. What vulgarity, what pointless joking, what pitiable attempts to serve up old impromptus réchauffés! I found it impossible to stay to the end. Some actors, capable of better things, worked hard; there was a terrible air of effort in these attempts to be sprightly in fetters, and in rusty fetters. Think of "La Veine" at its worst, and then think of "Betsy"! I must not ask you to contrast the actors; it would be almost unfair. We have not a company of comedians in England who can be compared for a moment with Mme. Jeanne Granier's company. We have here and there a good actor, a brilliant comic actor, in one kind or another of emphatic comedy; but wherever two or three comedians meet on the English stage, they immediately begin to check-

mate, or to outbid, or to shout down one another. No one is content, or no one is able, to take his place in an orchestra in which it is not allotted to every one to play a solo.

## A DOUBLE ENIGMA

When it was announced that Mrs. Tree was to give a translation of "L'Enigme" of M. Paul Hervieu at Wyndham's Theatre, the play was announced under the title "Which?" and as "Which?" it appeared on the placards. Suddenly new placards appeared, with a new title, not at all appropriate to the piece, "Cæsar's Wife." Rumours of a late decision, or indecision, of the censor were heard. The play had not been prohibited, but it had been adapted to more polite ears. But how? That was the question. I confess that to me the question seemed insoluble. Here is the situation as it exists in the play; nothing could be simpler, more direct, more difficult to tamper with.

Two brothers, Raymond and Gérard de Gourgiran, are in their country house, with their two wives, Giselle and Léonore,

and two guests, the old Marquis de Neste and the young M. de Vivarce. The brothers surprise Vivarce on the stairs: was he coming from the room of Giselle or of Léonore? The women are summoned; both deny everything; it is impossible for the audience, as for the husbands, to come to any conclusion. A shot is heard outside: Vivarce has killed himself, so that he may save the reputation of the woman he loves. Then the self-command of Léonore gives way; she avows all in a piercing shriek. After that there is some unnecessary moralising ("Là-bas un cadavre! Ici, des sanglots de captive!" and the like), but the play is over.

Now, the situation is perfectly precise; it is not, perhaps, very intellectually significant, but there it is, a striking dramatic situation. Above all, it is frank; there are no evasions, no sentimental lies, no hypocrisies before facts. If adultery may not be referred to on the English stage except at the Gaiety, between a wink and a laugh, then such a play becomes wholly impossible. Not at all: listen. We are told to suppose that

Vivarce and Léonore have had a possibly quite harmless flirtation; and instead of Vivarce being found on his way from Léonore's room, he has merely been walking with Léonore in the garden: at midnight remember, and after her husband has gone to bed. In order to lead up to this, a preposterous speech has been put into the mouth of the Marquis de Neste, an idiotic rhapsody about love and the stars, and I forget what else, which I imagine we are to take as an indication of Vivarce's sentiments as he walks with Léonore in the garden at midnight. But all these precautions are in vain; the audience is never deceived for an instant. A form of words has been used, like the form of words by which certain lies become technically truthful. The whole point of the play: has a husband the right to kill his wife or his wife's lover if he discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him? is obviously not a question of whether a husband may kill a gentleman who has walked with his wife in the garden, even after midnight. The force of the original situation comes pre-

cisely from the certainty of the fact and the uncertainty of the person responsible for it. "Cæsar's Wife" may lend her name for a screen; the screen is no disguise; the play remains what it was in its moral bearing; a dramatic stupidity has been imported into it, that is all. Here, then, in addition to the enigma of the play is a second, not so easily explained, enigma: the enigma of the censor, and of why he "moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." The play, I must confess, does not seem to me, as it seems to certain French critics, "une pièce qui tient du chef-d'œuvre . . . la tragédie des mâitres antiques et de Shakespeare." To me it is rather an insubstantial kind of ingenuity, ingenuity turning in a circle. As a tragic episode, the dramatisation of a striking incident, it has force and simplicity, the admirable quality of directness. Occasionally the people are too eager to express the last shade of the author's meaning, as in the conversation between Neste and Vivarce, when the latter decides to commit suicide, or in the supplementary comments when the

action is really at an end. But I have never seen a piece which seemed to have been written so kindly and so consistently for the benefit of the actors. There are six characters of equal importance; and each in turn absorbs the whole flood of the limelight.

The other piece which made Saturday evening interesting was a version of "Au Téléphone," one of Antoine's recent successes at his theatre in Paris. It was brutal and realistic, it made just the appeal of an accident really seen, and, so far as success in horrifying one is concerned, it was successful. A husband hearing the voice of his wife through the telephone, at the moment when some murderous ruffians are breaking into the house, hearing her last cry, and helpless to aid her, is as ingeniously unpleasant a situation as can well be imagined. It is brought before us with unquestionable skill; it makes us as uncomfortable as it wishes to make us. But such a situation has absolutely no artistic value, because terror without beauty and without significance is

not worth causing. When the husband, with his ear at the telephone, hears his wife tell him that some one is forcing the window-shutters with a crowbar, we feel, it is true, a certain sympathetic suspense; but compare this crude onslaught on the nerves with the profound and delicious terror that we experience when, in "La Mort de Tintagiles" of Maeterlinck, an invisible force pushes the door softly open, a force intangible and irresistible as death. In his acting Mr. Charles Warner was powerful, thrilling; it would be difficult to say, under the circumstances, that he was extravagant, for what extravagance, under the circumstances, would be improbable? He had not, no doubt, what I see described as "le jeu simple et terrible" of Antoine, a dry, hard, intellectual grip on horror; he had the ready abandonment to emotion of the average emotional man. Mr. Warner has an irritating voice and manner, but he has emotional power, not fine nor subtle, but genuine; he feels and he makes you feel. He has the quality, in short, of the play itself, but a

quality more tolerable in the actor, who is concerned only with the rendering of a given emotion, than in the playwright, whose business it is to choose, heighten, and dignify the emotion which he gives to him to render.

# DRAMA

## PROFESSIONAL AND UNPROFESSIONAL

Last week gave one an amusing opportunity of contrasting the merits and the defects of the professional and the unprofessional kind of play. "The Gay Lord Quex" was revived at the Duke of York's Theatre, and Mr. Alexander produced at the St. James's Theatre a play called "The Finding of Nancy," which had been chosen by the committee of the Playgoers' Club out of a large number of plays sent in for competition. The writer, Miss Netta Syrett, has published one or two novels or collections of stories; but this, as far as I am aware, is her first attempt at a play. Both plays were unusually well acted, and therefore may be contrasted without the necessity of making allowances for the way in which each was interpreted on the stage.

Mr. Pinero is a playwright with a sharp sense of the stage, and eye for what is tell-

ing, a cynical intelligence which is much more interesting than the uncertain outlook of most of our playwrights. He has no breadth of view, but he has a clear view; he makes his choice out of human nature deliberately, and he deals in his own way with the materials that he selects. Before saying to himself: what would this particular person say or do in these circumstances? he says to himself: what would it be effective on the stage for this particular person to do or say? He suggests nothing, he tells you all he knows; he cares to know nothing but what immediately concerns the purpose of his play. The existence of his people begins and ends with their first and last speech on the boards; the rest is silence, because he can tell you nothing about it. Sophy Fullgarney is a remarkably effective character as a stage-character, but when the play is over we know no more about her than we should know about her if we had spied upon her, in her own way, from behind some bush or keyhole. We have seen a picturesque and amusing exterior, and that is all. Lord

Quex does not, I suppose, profess to be even so much of a character as that, and the other people are mere "humours," quite amusing in their cleverly contrasted ways. When these people talk, they talk with an effort to be natural and another effort to be witty; they are never sincere and without self-consciousness; they never say inevitable things, only things that are effective to say. And they talk in poor English. Mr. Pinero has no sense of style, of the beauty or expressiveness of words. His joking is forced and without ideas; his serious writing is common. In "The Gay Lord Quex" he is continually trying to impress upon his audience that he is very audacious and distinctly improper. The improprieties are childish in the innocence of their vulgarity, and the audacities are no more than trifling lapses of taste. He shows you the interior of a Duchess's bedroom, and he shows you the Duchess's garter, in a box of other curiosities. He sets his gentlemen and ladies talking in the allusive style which you may overhear whenever you happen to be passing a group of

London cabmen. The Duchess has written in her diary, "Warm afternoon." That means that she has spent an hour with her lover. Many people in the audience laugh. All the cabmen would have laughed.

Now look for a moment at the play by the amateur and the woman. It is not a satisfactory play as a whole, it is not very interesting in all its developments, some of the best opportunities are shirked, some of the characters (all the characters who are men) are poor. But, in the first place, it is well written. Those people speak a language which is nearer to the language of real life than that used by Mr. Pinero, and when they make jokes there is generally some humour in the joke and some intelligence in the humour. They have ideas and they have feelings. The ideas and the feelings are not always combined with faultless logic into a perfectly clear and coherent presentment of character, it is true. But from time to time we get some of the illusion of life. From time to time something is said or done which we know to be profoundly true. A

woman has put into words some delicate instinct of a woman's soul. Here and there is a cry of the flesh, here and there a cry of the mind, which is genuine, which is a part of life. Miss Syrett has much to learn if she is to become a successful dramatist, and she has not as yet shown that she knows men as well as women; but at least she has begun at the right end. She has begun with human nature and not with the artifices of the stage, she has thought of her characters as people before thinking of them as persons of the drama, she has something to say through them, they are not mere lines in a pattern. I am not at all sure that she has the makings of a dramatist, or that if she writes another play it will be better than this one. You do not necessarily get to your destination by taking the right turning at the beginning of the journey. The one certain thing is that if you take the wrong turning at the beginning, and follow it persistently, you will not get to your destination at all. The playwright who writes merely for the stage, who squeezes the breath out of life

before he has suited it to his purpose, is at the best only playing a clever game with us. He may amuse us, but he is only playing ping-pong with the emotions. And that is why we should welcome, I think, any honest attempt to deal with life as it is, even if life as it is does not always come into the picture.

# TOLSTOI AND OTHERS

THERE is little material for the stage in the novels of Tolstoi. Those novels are full, it is true, of drama; but they cannot be condensed into dramas. The method of Tolstoi is slow, deliberate, significantly unemphatic; he works by adding detail to detail, as a certain kind of painter adds touch to touch. The result is, in a sense, monotonous, and it is meant to be monotonous. Tolstoi endeavours to give us something more nearly resembling daily life than any one has yet given us; and in daily life the moment of spiritual crisis is rarely the moment in which external action takes part. In the drama we can only properly realise the soul's action through some corresponding or consequent action which takes place visibly before us. You will find, throughout Tolstoi's work, many striking single scenes, but never, I think, a scene which can bear detachment from that network of detail which has led

up to it and which is to come out of it. Often the scene which most profoundly impresses one is a scene trifling in itself, and owing its impressiveness partly to that very quality. Take, for instance, in "Resurrection," Book II., chapter xxviiii., the scene in the theatre "during the second act of the eternal 'Dame aux Camélias,' in which a foreign actress once again, and in a novel manner, showed how women died of consumption." The General's wife, Mariette, smiles at Nekhludoff in the box, and, outside, in the street, another woman, the other "half-world," smiles at him, just in the same way. That is all, but to Nekhludoff it is one of the great crises of his life. He has seen something, for the first time, in what he now feels to be its true light, and he sees it "as clearly as he saw the palace, the sentinels, the fortress, the river, the boats and the Stock Exchange. And just as on this northern summer night there was no restful darkness on the earth, but only a dismal, dull light coming from an invisible source, so in Nekhludoff's soul there was no longer the restful darkness, igno-

rance." The chapter is profoundly impressive; it is one of those chapters which no one but Tolstoi has ever written. Imagine it transposed to the stage, if that were possible, and the inevitable disappearance of everything that gives it meaning!

In Tolstoi the story never exists for its own sake, but for the sake of a very definite moral idea. Even in his later novels Tolstoi is not a preacher; he gives us an interpretation of life, not a theorising about life. But, to him, the moral idea is almost everything, and (what is of more consequence) it gives a great part of its value to his "realism" of prisons and brothels and police courts. In all forms of art, the point of view is of more importance than the subject-matter. It is as essential for the novelist to get the right focus as it is for the painter. In a page of Zola and in a page of Tolstoi you might find the same gutter described with the same minuteness; and yet in reading the one you might see only the filth, while in reading the other you might feel only some fine human impulse. Tolstoi "sees life

steadily" because he sees it under a divine light; he has a saintly patience with evil, and so becomes a casuist through sympathy, a psychologist out of that pity which is understanding. And then, it is as a direct consequence of this point of view, in the mere process of unravelling things, that his greatest skill is shown as a novelist. He does not exactly write well; he is satisfied if his words express their meaning, and no more; his words have neither beauty nor subtlety in themselves. But, if you will only give him time, for he needs time, he will creep closer and closer up to some doubtful and remote truth, not knowing itself for what it is: he will reveal the soul to itself, like "God's spy."

If you want to know how daily life goes on among people who know as little about themselves as you know about your neighbours in a street or drawing-room, read Jane Austen, and, on that level, you will be perfectly satisfied. But if you want to know why these people are happy or unhappy, why the thing which they do deliberately is

not the thing which they either want or ought to do, read Tolstoi; and I can hardly add that you will be satisfied. I never read Tolstoi without a certain suspense, sometimes a certain terror. An accusing spirit seems to peer between every line; I can never tell what new disease of the soul those pitying and unswerving eyes may not have discovered.

Such, then, is a novel of Tolstoi; such, more than almost any of his novels, is "Resurrection," the masterpiece of his old age, into which he has put an art but little less consummate than that of "Anna Karenina," together with the finer spirit of his later gospel. Out of this novel a play in French was put together by M. Henry Bataille and produced at the Odéon. Now M. Bataille is one of the most powerful and original dramatists of our time. A play in English, said to be by MM. Henry Bataille and Michael Morton, has been produced by Mr. Tree at His Majesty's Theatre; and the play is called, as the French play was called, Tolstoi's "Resurrection." What Mr. Morton has done with M. Bataille I cannot

say. I have read in a capable French paper that "l'on est heureux d'avoir pu applaudir une œuvre vraiment noble, vraiment pure," in the play of M. Bataille; and I believe it. Are those quite the words one would use about the play in English?

They are not quite the words I would use about the play in English. It is a melodrama with one good scene, the scene in the prison; and this is good only to a certain point. There is another scene which is amusing, the scene of the jury, but the humour is little more than clowning, and the tragic note, which should strike through it, is only there in a parody of itself. Indeed the word parody is the only word which can be used about the greater part of the play, and it seems to me a pity that the name of Tolstoi should be brought into such dangerous companionship with the vulgarities and sentimentalities of the London stage. I heard people around me confessing that they had not read the book. How terrible must have been the disillusion of those people, if they had ever expected anything of Tolstoi, and if they

really believed that this demagogue Prince, who stands in nice poses in the middle of drawing-rooms and of prison cells, talking nonsense with a convincing disbelief, was in any sense a mouthpiece for Tolstoi's poor simple little gospel. Tolstoi according to Captain Marshall, I should be inclined to define him; but I must give Mr. Tree his full credit in the matter. When he crucifies himself, so to speak, symbolically, across the door of the jury-room, remarking in his slowest manner: "The bird flutters no longer; I must atone, I must atone!" one is, in every sense, alone with the actor. Mr. Tree has many arts, but he has not the art of sincerity. His conception of acting is, literally, to act, on every occasion. Even in the prison scene, in which Miss Ashwell is so good, until she begins to shout and he to rant, "and then the care is over," Mr. Tree cannot be his part without acting it.

That prison scene is, on the whole, well done, and the first part of it, when the women shout and drink and quarrel, is acted with a satisfying sense of vulgarity which

contrasts singularly with what is meant to be a suggestion of the manners of society in St. Petersburg in the scene preceding. Perhaps the most lamentable thing in the play is the first act. This act takes the place of those astounding chapters in the novel in which the seduction of Katusha is described with a truth, tact, frankness, and subtlety unparalleled in any novel I have ever read. I read them over before I went to the theatre, and when I got to the theatre I found a scene before me which was not Tolstoi's scene, a foolish, sentimental conversation in which I recognised hardly more than a sentence of Tolstoi (and this brought in in the wrong place), and, in short, the old make-believe of all the hack-writers for the stage, dished up again, and put before us, with a simplicity of audacity at which one can only marvel ("a thing imagination boggles at"), as an "adaptation" from Tolstoi. Tolstoi has been hardly treated by some translators and by many critics; in his own country, if you mention his name, you are as likely as not to be met by a shrug and an

"Ah, monsieur, il divague un peu!" In his own country he has the censor always against him; some of his books he has never been able to print in full in Russian. But in the new play at His Majesty's Theatre we have, in what is boldly called Tolstoi's "Resurrection," something which is not Tolstoi at all. There is M. Bataille, who is a poet of nature and a dramatist who has created a new form of drama: let him be exonerated. Mr. Morton and Mr. Tree between them may have been the spoilers of M. Bataille; but Tolstoi, might not the great name of Tolstoi have been left well alone?

# SOME PROBLEM PLAYS

## I. "THE MARRYING OF ANN LEETE"

It was for the production of such plays as Mr. Granville Barker's that the Stage Society was founded, and it is doing good service to the drama in producing them. "The Marrying of Ann Leete" is the cleverest and most promising new play that I have seen for a long time; but it cannot be said to have succeeded even with the Stage Society audience, and no ordinary theatrical manager is very likely to produce it. The author, it is true, is an actor, but he is young; his play is immature, too crowded with people, too knotted up with motives, too inconclusive in effect. He knows the stage, and his knowledge has enabled him to use the stage for his own purposes, inventing a kind of technique of his own, doing one or two things which have never, or never so deftly, been done before. But he is something besides all that; he can

think, he can write, and he can suggest real men and women. The play opens in the dark, and remains for some time brilliantly ambiguous. People, late eighteenth-century people, talk with bewildering abruptness, not less bewildering point; they, their motives, their characters, swim slowly into daylight. Some of the dialogue is, as the writer says of politics, "a game for clever children, women, and fools"; it is a game demanding close attention. A courtly indolence, an intellectual blackguardism, is in the air; people walk, as it seems, aimlessly in and out, and the game goes on; it fills one with excitement, the excitement of following a trail. It is a trail of ideas, these people think, and they act because they have thought. They know the words they use, they use them with deliberation, their hearts are in their words. Their actions, indeed, are disconcerting; but these people, and their disconcerting actions, are interesting, holding one's mind in suspense.

Mr. Granville Barker has tried to tell the whole history of a family, and he interests

us in every member of that family. He plays them like chessmen, and their moves excite us as chess excites the mind. They express ideas; the writer has thought out their place in the scheme of things, and he has put his own faculty of thinking into their heads. They talk for effect, or rather for disguise; it is part of their keen sense of the game. They talk at cross-purposes, as they wander in and out of the garden terrace; they plan out their lives, and life comes and surprises them by the way. Then they speak straight out of their hearts, sometimes crudely, sometimes with a naïveté which seems laughable; and they act on sudden impulses, accepting the consequences when they come. They live an artificial life, knowing lies to be lies, and choosing them; they are civilised, they try to do their duty by society; only, at every moment, some ugly gap opens in the earth, right in their path, and they have to stop, consider, choose a new direction. They seem to go their own way, almost without guiding; and indeed may have escaped almost literally out of their author's hands. The last

scene is an admirable episode, a new thing on the stage, full of truth within its own limits; but it is an episode, not a conclusion, much less a solution. Mr. Barker can write: he writes in short, sharp sentences, which go off like pistol-shots, and he keeps up the firing, from every corner of the stage. He brings his people on and off with an unconventionality which comes of knowing the resources of the theatre, and of being unfettered by the traditions of its technique. The scene with the gardener in the second act has extraordinary technical merit, and it has the art which conceals its art. There are other inventions in the play, not all quite so convincing. Sometimes Mr. Barker, in doing the right or the clever thing, does it just not quite strongly enough to carry it against opposition. The opposition is the firm and narrow mind of the British playgoer. Such plays as Mr. Barker's are apt to annoy without crushing. The artist, who is yet an imperfect artist, bewilders the world with what is novel in his art; the great artist convinces the world. Mr. Barker is young: he will

come to think with more depth and less tumult; he will come to work with less prodigality and more mastery of means. But he has energy already, and a sense of what is absurd and honest in the spectacle of this game, in which the pawns seem to move themselves.

## II. "THE LADY FROM THE SEA"

On seeing the Stage Society's performance of Ibsen's "Lady from the Sea," I found myself wondering whether Ibsen is always so unerring in his stagecraft as one is inclined to assume, and whether there are not things in his plays which exist more satisfactorily, are easier to believe in, in the book than on the stage. Does not the play, for instance, lose a little in its acceptance of those narrow limits of the footlights? That is the question which I was asking myself as I saw the performance of the Stage Society. The play is, according to the phrase, a problem-play, but the problem is the problem of all Ibsen's

plays: the desire of life, the attraction of life, the mystery of life. Only, we see the eternal question under a new, strange aspect. The sea calls to the blood of this woman, who has married into an inland home; and the sea-cry, which is the desire of more abundant life, of unlimited freedom, of an unknown ecstasy, takes form in a vague Stranger, who has talked to her of the sea-birds in a voice like their own, and whose eyes seem to her to have the green changes of the sea. It is an admirable symbol, but when a bearded gentleman with a knapsack on his back climbs over the garden wall and says: "I have come for you; are you coming?" and then tells the woman that he has read of her marriage in the newspaper, it seemed as if the symbol had lost a good deal of its meaning in the gross act of taking flesh. The play haunts one, as it is, but it would have haunted one with a more subtle witchcraft if the Stranger had never appeared upon the stage. Just as Wagner insisted upon a crawling and howling dragon, a Fafner with a name of his own

and a considerable presence, so Ibsen brings the supernatural or the subconscious a little crudely into the midst of his persons of the drama. To use symbol, and not to use it in the surprising and inevitable way of the poet, is to fall into the dry, impotent sin of allegory.

### III. "THE NEW IDOL"

It was an interesting experiment on the part of the Stage Society to give a translalation of "La Nouvelle Idole," one of those pieces by which M. François de Curel has reached that very actual section of the French public which is interested in ideas. "The New Idol" is a modern play of the most characteristically modern type; its subject-matter is largely medical, it deals with the treatment of cancer; we are shown a doctor's laboratory, with a horrible elongated diagram of the inside of the human body; a young girl's lungs are sounded in the doctor's drawing-room; nearly every character talks science and very little but science. When they cease talking science,

which they talk well, with earnestness and with knowledge, and try to talk love or intrigue, they talk badly, as if they were talking of things which they knew nothing about. Now, personally, this kind of talk does not interest me; it makes me feel uncomfortable. But I am ready to admit that it is justified if I find that the dramatic movement of the play requires it, that it is itself an essential part of the action. In "The New Idol" I think this is partly the case. The other medical play which has lately been disturbing Paris, "Les Avariés," does not seem to me to fulfil this condition at any moment: it is a pamphlet from begining to end, it is not a satisfactory pamphlet, and it has no other excuse for existence. But M. de Curel has woven his problem into at least a semblance of action; the play is not a mere discussion of irresistible physical laws; the will enters into the problem, and will fights against will, and against not quite irresistible physical laws. The suggestion of love interests, which come to nothing, and have no real bearing on the

main situation, seems to me a mistake; it complicates things, things which must appear to us so very real if we are to accept them at all, with rather a theatrical kind of complication. M. de Curel is more a thinker than a dramatist, as he has shown lately in the very original, interesting, impossible "Fille Sauvage." He grapples with serious matters seriously, and he argues well, with a closely woven structure of arguments; some of them bringing a kind of hard and naked poetry out of mere closeness of thinking and closeness of seeing. In "The New Idol" there is some dialogue, real dialogue, natural give-and-take, about the fear of death and the horror of indestructibility (a variation on one of the finest of Coventry Patmore's odes) which seemed to me admirable: it held the audience because it was direct speech, expressing a universal human feeling in the light of a vivid individual crisis. But such writing as this was rare; for the most part it was the problem itself which insisted on occupying our attention, or, distinct from this, the too theatrical characters.

## IV. "MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION"

The Stage Society has shown the courage of its opinions by giving an unlicensed play, "Mrs. Warren's Profession," one of the "unpleasant plays" of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, at the theatre of the New Lyric Club. It was well acted, with the exception of two of the characters, and the part of Mrs. Warren was played by Miss Fanny Brough, one of the cleverest actresses on the English stage, with remarkable ability. The action was a little cramped by the smallness of the stage, but, for all that, the play was seen under quite fair conditions, conditions under which it could be judged as an acting play and as a work of art. It is brilliantly clever, with a close, detective cleverness, all made up of merciless logic and unanswerable common sense. The principal characters are well drawn, the scenes are constructed with a great deal of theatrical skill, the dialogue is telling, the interest is held throughout. To say that the characters, without exception, are ugly in their

vice and ugly in their virtue; that they all have, men and women, something of the cad in them; that their language is the language of vulgar persons, is, perhaps, only to say that Mr. Shaw has chosen, for artistic reasons, to represent such people just as they are. But there is something more to be said. "Mrs. Warren's Profession" is not a representation of life; it is a discussion about life. Now, discussion on the stage may be interesting. Why not? Discussion is the most interesting thing in the world, off the stage; it is the only thing that makes an hour pass vividly in society; but when discussion ends art has not begun. It is interesting to see a sculptor handling bits of clay, sticking them on here, scraping them off there; but that is only the interest of a process. When he has finished I will consider whether his figure is well or ill done; until he has finished I can have no opinion about it. It is the same thing with discussion on the stage. The subject of Mr. Shaw's discussion is what is called a "nasty" one. That is neither here nor there, though it may be

pointed out that there is no essential difference between the problem that he discusses and the problem that is at the root of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray."

But Mr. Shaw, I believe, is never without his polemical intentions, and I should like, for a moment, to ask whether his discussion of his problem, taken on its own merits, is altogether the best way to discuss things. Mr. Shaw has an ideal of life: he asks that men and women should be perfectly reasonable, that they should clear their minds of cant, and speak out everything that is in their minds. He asks for cold and clear logic, and when he talks about right and wrong he is really talking about right and wrong logic. Now, logic is not the mainspring of every action, nor is justice only the inevitable working out of an equation. Humanity, as Mr. Shaw sees it, moves like clockwork; and must be regulated as a watch is, and praised or blamed simply in proportion to its exactitude in keeping time. Humanity, as Mr. Shaw knows, does not move by clockwork, and the ultimate justice will

have to take count of more exceptions and irregularities than Mr. Shaw takes count of. There is a great living writer who has brought to bear on human problems as consistent a logic as Mr. Shaw's, together with something which Mr. Shaw disdains. Mr. Shaw's logic is sterile, because it is without sense of touch, sense of sight, or sense of hearing; once set going it is warranted to go straight, and to go through every obstacle. Tolstoi's logic is fruitful, because it allows for human weakness, because it understands, and because to understand is, among other things, to pardon. In a word, the difference between the spirit of Tolstoi and the spirit of Mr. Shaw is the difference between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Euclid.

## "MONNA VANNA"

In his earlier plays Maeterlinck invented a world of his own, which was a sort of projection into space of the world of nursery legends and of childish romances. It was at once very abstract and very local. There was a castle by the sea, a "well at the world's end," a pool in a forest; princesses with names out of the "Morte d'Arthur" lost crowns of gold; and blind beggars without a name wandered in the darkness of eternal terror. Death was always the scene-shifter of the play, and destiny the stage-manager. The people who came and went had the blind gestures of marionettes, and one pitied their helplessness. Pity and terror had indeed gone to the making of this drama, in a sense much more literal than Aristotle's.

In all these plays there were few words and many silences, and the words were ambiguous, hesitating, often repeated, like the

words of peasants or children. They were rarely beautiful in themselves, rarely even significant, but they suggested a singular kind of beauty and significance, through their adjustment in a pattern or arabesque. Atmosphere, the suggestion of what was not said, was everything; and in an essay in "Le Trésor des Humbles" Maeterlinck told us that in drama, as he conceived it, it was only the words that were not said which mattered.

Gradually the words began to mean more in the scheme of the play. With "Aglavaine et Sélysette" we got a drama of the inner life, in which there was little action, little effective dramatic speech, but in which people thought about action and talked about action, and discussed the morality of things and their meaning, very beautifully.

"Monna Vanna" is a development out of "Aglavaine et Sélysette," and in it for the first time Maeterlinck has represented the conflicts of the inner life in an external form, making drama, while the people who

undergo them discuss them frankly at the moment of their happening.

In a significant passage of "La Sagesse et la Destinée," Maeterlinck says: "On nous affirme que toutes les grandes tragédies ne nous offrent pas d'autre spectacle que la lutte de l'homme contre la fatalité. Je crois, au contraire, qu'il n'existe pas une seule tragédie où la fatalité règne réellement. J'ai beau les parcourir, je n'en trouve pas une où le héros combatte le destin pur et simple. Au fond, ce n'est jamais le destin, c'est toujours la sagesse, qu'il attaque." And, on the preceding page, he says: "Observons que les poètes tragiques osent très rarement permettre au sage de paraître un moment sur la scène. Ils craignent une âme haute parce que les événements la craignent." Now it is this conception of life and of drama that we find in "Monna Vanna." We see the conflict of wisdom, personified in the old man Marco and in the instinctively wise Giovanna, with the tragic folly personified in the husband Guido, who rebels against truth and against life, and loses even that which he

would sacrifice the world to keep. The play is full of lessons in life, and its deepest lesson is a warning against the too ready acceptance of this or that aspect of truth or of morality. Here is a play in which almost every character is noble, in which treachery becomes a virtue, a lie becomes more vital than truth, and only what we are accustomed to call virtue shows itself mean, petty, and even criminal. And it is most like life, as life really is, in this: that at any moment the whole course of the action might be changed, the position of every character altered, or even reversed, by a mere decision of the will, open to each, and that things happen as they do because it is impossible, in the nature of each, that the choice could be otherwise. Character, in the deepest sense, makes the action, and there is something in the movement of the play which resembles the grave and reasonable march of a play of Sophocles, in which men and women deliberate wisely and not only passionately, in which it is not only the cry of the heart and of the senses which takes the form of drama.

In Maeterlinck's earlier plays, in "Les Aveugles," "Intérieur," and even "Pelléas et Mélisande," he is dramatic after a new, experimental fashion of his own; "Monna Vanna" is dramatic in the obvious sense of the word. The action moves, and moves always in an interesting, even in a telling, way. But at the same time I cannot but feel that something has been lost. The speeches, which were once so short as to be enigmatical, are now too long, too explanatory; they are sometimes rhetorical, and have more logic than life. The playwright has gained experience, the thinker has gained wisdom, but the curious artist has lost some of his magic. No doubt the wizard had drawn his circle too small, but now he has stepped outside his circle into a world which no longer obeys his formulas. In casting away his formulas, has he the big human mastery which alone could replace them? "Monna Vanna" is a remarkable and beautiful play, but it is not a masterpiece. "La Mort de Tintagiles" was a masterpiece of a tiny, too deliberate kind; but it did some-

thing which no one had ever done before. We must still, though we have seen "Monna Vanna," wait, feeling that Maeterlinck has not given us all that he is capable of giving us.

## THE QUESTION OF CENSORSHIP

THE letter of protest which appeared in the *Times* of June 30, 1903, signed by Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Meredith, and Mr. Hardy, the three highest names in contemporary English literature, will, I hope, have done something to save the literary reputation of England from such a fate as one eminent dramatic critic sees in store for it. "Once more," says the *Athenæum,* "the caprice of our censure brings contempt upon us, and makes, or should make, us the laughing-stock of Europe." The *Morning Post* is more lenient, and is "sincerely sorry for the unfortunate censor," because "he has immortalised himself by prohibiting the most beautiful play of his time, and must live to be the laughing-stock of all sensible people."

Now the question is: which is really made ridiculous by this ridiculous episode of the prohibition of Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna," England or Mr. Redford? Mr. Red-

ford is a gentleman of whom I only know that he is not himself a man of letters, and that he has not given any public indication of an intelligent interest in literature as literature. If, as a private person, before his appointment to the official post of censor of the drama, he had expressed in print an opinion on any literary or dramatic question, that opinion would have been taken on its own merits, and would have carried only the weight of its own contents. The official appointment, which gives him absolute power over the public life or death of a play, gives to the public no guarantee of his fitness for the post. So far as the public can judge, he was chosen as the typical "man in the street," the "plain man who wants a plain answer," the type of the "golden mean," or mediocrity. We hear that he is honest and diligent, that he reads every word of every play sent for his inspection. These are the virtues of the capable clerk, not of the penetrating judge. Now the position, if it is to be taken seriously, must require delicate discernment as well as inflexible up-

rightness. Is Mr. Redford capable of discriminating between what is artistically fine and what is artistically ignoble? If not, he is certainly incapable of discriminating between what is morally fine and what is morally ignoble. It is useless for him to say that he is not concerned with art, but with morals. They cannot be dissevered, because it is really the art which makes the morality. In other words, morality does not consist in the facts of a situation or in the words of a speech, but in the spirit which informs the whole work. Whatever may be the facts of "Monna Vanna" (and I contend that they are entirely above reproach, even as facts), no one capable of discerning the spirit of a work could possibly fail to realise that the whole tendency of the play is noble and invigorating. All this, all that is essential, evidently escapes Mr. Redford. He licenses what the *Times* rightly calls "such a gross indecency as 'The Girl from Maxim's.'" But he refuses to license "Monna Vanna," and he refuses to state his reason for withholding the license. The fact is, that moral

questions are discussed in it, not taken for granted, and the plain man, the man in the street, is alarmed whenever people begin to discuss moral questions. "The Girl from Maxim's" is merely indecent, it raises no problems. "Monna Vanna" raises problems. Therefore, says the censor, it must be suppressed. By his decision in regard to this play of Maeterlinck, Mr. Redford has of course conclusively proved his unfitness for his post. But that is only one part of the question. The question is: could any one man be found on whose opinion all England might safely rely for its dramatic instruction and entertainment? I do not think such a man could be found. With Mr. Redford, as the *Times* puts it, "any tinge of literary merit seems at once to excite his worst suspicions." But with a censor whose sympathies were too purely literary, literary in too narrow a sense, would not scruples of some other kind begin to intrude themselves, scruples of the student who cannot tolerate an innocent jesting with "serious" things, scruples of the moralist who must choose be-

tween Maeterlinck and d'Annunzio, between Tolstoi and Ibsen? I cannot so much as think of a man in all England who would be capable of justifying the existence of the censorship. Is it, then, merely Mr. Redford who is made ridiculous by this ridiculous episode, or is it not, after all, England, which has given us the liberty of the press and withheld from us the liberty of the stage?

## A PLAY AND THE PUBLIC

John Oliver Hobbes, Mrs. Craigie, once wrote a play called "The Bishop's Move," which was an attempt to do artistically what so many writers for the stage have done without thinking about art at all.

She gave us good writing instead of bad, delicate worldly wisdom instead of vague sentiment or vague cynicism, and the manners of society instead of an imitation of some remote imitation of those manners. The play is a comedy, and the situations are not allowed to get beyond the control of good manners. The game is after all the thing, and the skill of the game. When the pawns begin to cry out in the plaintive way of pawns, they are hushed before they become disturbing. It is in this power to play the game on its own artificial lines, and yet to play with pieces made scrupulously after the pattern of nature, that Mrs.

Craigie's skill, in this play, seems to me to consist.

Here then, is a play which makes no demands on the pocket handkerchief, to stifle either laughter or sobs, but in which the writer is seen treating the real people of the audience and the imaginary people of the play as if they were alike ladies and gentmen. How this kind of work will appeal to the general public I can hardly tell. When I saw "Sweet and Twenty" on its first performance, I honestly expected the audience to burst out laughing. On the contrary, the audience thrilled with delight, and audidience after audience went on indefinitely thrilling with delight. If the caricature of the natural emotions can give so much pleasure, will a delicate suggestion of them, as in this play, ever mean very much to the public?

The public in England is a strange creature, to be studied with wonder and curiosity and I am not sure that a native can ever hope to understand it. At the performance of a recent melodrama, "Sweet Nell of

Old Drury," I happened to be in the last row of the stalls. My seat was not altogether well adapted for seeing and hearing the play, but it was admirably adapted for observing the pit, and I gave some of my attention to my neighbours there. Whenever a foolish joke was made on the stage, when Miss Julia Neilson, as Nell, the orange girl, stuttered with laughter or romped heavily across the stage, the pit thrilled and quivered with delight. At every piece of clowning there was the same responsive gurgle of delight. Tricks of acting so badly done that I should have thought a child would have seen through them, and resented them as an imposition, were accepted in perfect good faith, and gloated over. I was turning over the matter in my mind afterwards, when I remembered something that was said to me the other day by a young Swedish poet who is now in London. He told me that he had been to most of the theatres, and he had been surprised to find that the greater part of the pieces which were played at the principal London theatres

were such pieces as would be played in Norway and Sweden at the lower class theatres, and that nobody here seemed to mind. The English audience, he said, reminded him of a lot of children; they took what was set before them with ingenuous good temper, they laughed when they were expected to laugh, cried when they were expected to cry. But of criticism, preference, selection, not a trace. He was amazed, for he had been told that London was the centre of civilisation. Well, in future I shall try to remember, when I hear an audience clapping its hands wildly over some bad play, badly acted: it is all right, it is only the children.

## THE TEST OF THE ACTOR

THE interest of bad plays lies in the test which they afford of the capability of the actor. To what extent, however, can an actor really carry through a play which has not even the merits of its defects, such a play, for instance, as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones has produced in "The Princess's Nose"? Mr. Jones has sometimes been mistaken for a man of letters, as by a distinguished dramatic critic, who, writing a complimentary preface, has said: "The claim of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones's more ambitious plays to rank as literature may have been in some cases grudgingly allowed, but has not been seriously contested." Mr. Jones himself has assured us that he has thought about life, and would like to give some representation of it in his plays. That is apparently what he means by this peroration, which once closed an article in the *Nineteenth Century:* "O human life! so

varied, so vast, so complex, so rich and subtle in tremulous deep organ tones, and soft proclaim of silver flutes, so utterly beyond our spell of insight, who of us can govern the thunder and whirlwind of thy ventages to any utterance of harmony, or pluck out the heart of thy eternal mystery?" Does Mr. Jones, I wonder, or the distinguished critic, really hear any "soft proclaim of silver flutes," or any of the other organ effects which he enumerates, in "The Princess's Nose"? Does anyone "seriously contest" its right not to "rank as literature"? The audience, for once, was unanimous. Mr. Jones was not encouraged to appear. And yet there had been applause, prolonged applause, at many points throughout this bewildering evening. The applause was meant for the actors.

If Mr. Jones had shown as much tact in the construction of his play as in the selection of his cast, how admirable the play would have been! I have rarely seen a play in which each actor seemed to fit into his part with such exactitude. But the play!

Well, the play began as a comedy, continued as a tragedy, and ended as a farce. It came to a crisis every five minutes, it suggested splendid situations, and then caricatured them unintentionally, it went shilly-shallying about among the emotions and sensations which may be drama or melodrama, whichever the handling makes them. "You see there is a little poetical justice going about the world," says the Princess, when she hears that her rival, against whom she has fought in vain, has been upset by Providence in the form of a motor-car, and the bridge of her nose broken. The broken nose is Mr. Jones's symbol for poetical justice; it indicates his intellectual attitude. There are many parts of the play where he shows, as he has so often shown, a genuine skill in presenting and manipulating humorous minor characters. As usual, they have little to do with the play, but they are amusing for their moment. It is the serious characters who will not be serious. They are meant well, the action hovers about them with little tempting solicitations, con-

tinually offering them an opportunity to be fine, to be genuine, and then withdrawing it before it can be grasped. The third act has all the material of tragedy, but the material is wasted; only the actress makes anything of it. We know how Sullivan will take a motive of mere farce, such words as the "O Captain Shaw!" of "Iolanthe," and will write a lovely melody to go with it, fitting his music to the feeling which the words do but caricature. That is how Miss Irene Vanbrugh handled Mr. Jones's unshapen material. By the earnestness, sincerity, sheer nature, power, fire, dignity, and gaiety of her acting, she made for us a figure which Mr. Jones had not made. Mr. Jones would set his character in some impossible situation, and Miss Vanbrugh would make us, for the moment, forget its impossibility. He would give her a trivial or a grotesque or a vulgar action to do, and she would do it with distinction. She had force in lightness, a vivid malice, a magnetic cheerfulness; and she could suffer silently, and be sincere in a tragedy which had been conceived without sin-

cerity. If acting could save a play, "The Princess's Nose" would have been saved. It was not saved.

And the reason is that even the best of actors cannot save a play which insists on defeating them at every turn. Yet, as we may realise any day when Sarah Bernhardt acts before us, there is a certain kind of frankly melodramatic play which can be lifted into at all events a region of excited and gratified nerves. I have lately been to see a melodrama called "The Heel of Achilles," which Miss Julia Neilson has been giving at the Globe Theatre. The play was meant to tear at one's susceptibilities, much as "La Tosca" tears at them. "La Tosca" is not a fine play in itself, though it is a much better play than "The Heel of Achilles." But it is the vivid, sensational acting of Sarah Bernhardt which gives one all the shudders. "The Heel of Achilles" did not give me a single shudder, not because it was not packed with the raw material of sensation, but because

Miss Julia Neilson went through so many trying experiences with nerves of marble.

I cannot help wondering at the curious lack of self-knowledge in actors. Here is a play, which depends for a great deal of its effect on a scene in which Lady Leslie, a young Englishwoman in Russia, promises to marry a Russian prince whom she hates, in order to save her betrothed lover from being sent to Siberia. The lover is shut in between two doors, unable to get out; he is the bearer of a State secret, and everything depends on his being able to catch the eleven P. M. train for Berlin. The Russian prince stands before the young Englishwoman, offering her the key of the door, the safety of her lover, and his own hand in marriage. Now, she has to express by her face and her movements all the feelings of astonishment, horror, suspense, love, hatred, distraction, which such a situation would call up in her. If she does not express them the scene goes for nothing. The actress stakes all on this scene.

Now, is it possible that Miss Julia Neilson really imagined herself to be capable of rendering this scene as it should be rendered? It is a scene that requires no brains, no subtle emotional quality, none of the more intellectual merits of acting. It requires simply a great passivity to feeling, the mere skill of letting horrors sweep over the face and the body like drenching waves. The actress need not know how she does it; she may do it without an effort, or she may obtain her spontaneity by an elaborate calculation. But to do it at all she must be the actress in every fibre of her body; she must be able to vibrate freely. If the emotion does not seize her in its own grasp, and then seize us through her, it will all go for nothing. Well, Miss Neilson sat, and walked, and started, and became rigid, and glanced at the clock, and knelt, and fell against the wall, and cast her eyes about, and threw her arms out, and made her voice husky; and it all went for nothing. Never for an instant did she suggest what she was trying to suggest, and after the first moment of disappointment the mind

was left calmly free to watch her attempt as if it were speculating round a problem.

How many English actresses, I wonder, would have been capable of dealing adequately with such a scene as that? I take it, not because it is a good scene, but because it affords so rudimentary a test of the capacity for acting. The test of the capacity for acting begins where words end; it is independent of words; you may take poor words as well as fine words; it is all the same. The embodying power, the power to throw open one's whole nature to an overcoming sensation, the power to render this sensation in so inevitable a way that others shall feel it: that is the one thing needful. It is not art, it is not even the beginning of art; but it is the foundation on which alone art can be built.

The other day, in "Ulysses," there was only one piece of acting that was quite convincing: the acting of Mr. Brough as the Swineherd. It is a small part and an easy part, but it was perfectly done. Almost

any other part would have been more striking and surprising if it had been done as perfectly, but no other part was done as perfectly. Mr. Brough has developed a stage-personality of his own, with only a limited range of emotion, but he has developed it until it has become a second nature with him. He has only to speak, and he may say what he likes; we accept him after the first word, and he remains what that first word has shown him to be. Mr. Tree, with his many gifts, his effective talents, all his taste, ambition, versatility, never produces just that effect: he remains interestingly aside from what he is doing; you see his brain working upon it, you enjoy his by-play; his gait, his studied gestures, absorb you; "How well this is done!" you say, and "How well that is done!" and, indeed, you get a complete picture out of his representation of that part: a picture, not a man.

I am not sure that melodrama is not the hardest test of the actor: it is, at least, the surest. All the human emotions throng

noisily together in the making of melodrama: they are left there, in their naked muddle, and they come to no good end; but there they are. To represent any primary emotion, and to be ineffective, is to fail in the fundamental thing. All actors should be sent to school in melodrama, as all dramatic authors should learn their trade there.

## THE PRICE OF REALISM

Modern staging, which has been carried in England to its highest point of excellence, professes to aim at beauty, and is, indeed, often beautiful in detail. But its real aim is not at the creation of beautiful pictures, in subordination to the words and actions of the play, but at supplementing words and actions by an exact imitation of real surroundings. Imitation, not creation, is its end, and in its attempt to imitate the general aspect of things it leads the way to the substitution of things themselves for perfectly satisfactory indications of them. "Real water" we have all heard of, and we know its place in the theatre; but this is only the simplest form of this anti-artistic endeavour to be real. Sir Henry Irving will use, for a piece of decoration meant to be seen only from a distance, a garland of imitation flowers, exceedingly well done, costing perhaps

two pounds, where two or three brushes of paint would have supplied its place more effectively. When d'Annunzio's "Francesca da Rimini" was put on the stage in Rome, a pot of basil was brought daily from Naples in order that it might be laid on the window-sill of the room in which Francesca and Paolo read of Lancelot and Guinevere. In an interview published in one of the English papers, d'Annunzio declared that he had all his stage decorations made in precious metal by fine craftsmen, and that he had done this for an artistic purpose, and not only for the beauty of the things themselves. The gesture, he said, of the actor who lifts to his lips a cup of finely-wrought gold will be finer, more sincere, than that of the actor who uses a gilded "property."

If so, I can but answer, the actor is no actor, but an amateur. The true actor walks in a world as real in its unreality as that which surrounds the poet or the enthusiast. The bare boards, chairs, and T-light, in the midst of which he rehearses, are as significantly palaces or meadows to him, while he

speaks his lines and lives himself into his character, as all the real grass and real woodwork with which the manager will cumber the stage on the first night. As little will he need to distinguish between the gilt and the gold cup as between the imaginary characters who surround him, and his mere friends and acquaintances who are speaking for them.

This costly and inartistic aim at reality, then, is the vice of the modern stage, and, at its best or worst, can it be said that it is really even what it pretends to be: a perfectly deceptive imitation of the real thing? I said once, to clinch an argument against it, by giving it its full possible credit, that the modern staging can give you the hour of the day and the corner of the country with precise accuracy. But can it? Has the most gradual of stage-moons ever caught the miraculous lunar trick to the life? Has the real hedgerow ever brought a breath of the country upon the stage? I do not think so, and meanwhile, we have been trying our hardest to persuade ourselves that it is so,

instead of abandoning ourselves to a new, strange atmosphere, to the magic of the play itself.

What Mr. Craig does is to provide a plain, conventional, or darkened background for life, as life works out its own ordered lines on the stage; he gives us suggestion instead of reality, a symbol instead of an imitation; and he relies, for his effects, on a new system of lighting from above, not from below, and on a quite new kind of drill, as I may call it, by which he uses his characters as masses and patterns, teaching them to move all together, with identical gestures. The eye is carried right through or beyond these horizons of canvas, and the imagination with it; instead of stopping entangled among real stalks and painted gables.

I have seen nothing so imaginative, so restful, so expressive, on the English stage as these simple and elaborately woven designs, in patterns of light and drapery and movement, which in "The Masque of Love" had a new quality of charm, a completeness of invention, for which I would

have given all d'Annunzio's golden cups and Mr. Tree's boats on real Thames water.

Here, for once, we see the stage treated in the proper spirit, as material for art, not as a collection of real objects, or the imitation of real objects. Why should not the visible world be treated in the same spirit as the invisible world of character and temperament? A fine play is not the copy of an incident or the stenography of a character. A poetical play, to limit myself to that, requires to be put on the stage in such a way as to suggest that atmosphere which, if it is a true poem, will envelop its mental outlines. That atmosphere, which is of its essence, is the first thing to be lost, in the staging of most poetical plays. It is precisely what the stage-manager, if he happens to have the secret of his own art, will endeavour most persistently to suggest. He will make it his business to compete with the poet, and not, after the manner of Drury Lane, with the accidents of life and the vulgarities of nature.

## ON CROSSING STAGE TO RIGHT

If you look into the actors' prompt-books, the most frequent direction which you will find is this: "Cross stage to right." It is not a mere direction, it is a formula; it is not a formula only, but a universal remedy. Whenever the action seems to flag, or the dialogue to become weak or wordy, you must "cross stage to right"; no matter what is wrong with the play, this will set it right. We have heard so much of the "action" of a play, that the stage-manager in England seems to imagine that dramatic action is literally a movement of people across the stage, even if for no other reason than for movement's sake. Is the play weak? He tries to strengthen it, poor thing, by sending it out walking for its health.

If we take drama with any seriousness, as an art as well as an improvisation, we shall realise that one of its main requirements is that it should make pictures. That is the

lesson of Bayreuth, and when one comes away, the impression which remains, almost longer than the impression of the music itself, is that grave, regulated motion of the actors. As I have said elsewhere, no actor makes a gesture which has not been regulated for him; there is none of that unintelligent haphazard known as being "natural"; these people move like music, or with that sense of motion which it is the business of painting to arrest. But here, of course, I am speaking of the poetic drama, of drama which does not aim at the realistic representation of modern life. Maeterlinck should be acted in this solemn way, in a kind of convention; but I admit that you cannot act Ibsen in quite the same way.

The other day, when Mme. Jeanne Granier's company came over here to give us some lessons in acting, I watched a little scene in "La Veine," which was one of the telling scenes of the play: Guitry and Brasseur standing face to face for some minutes, looking at their watches, and then waiting, each with a single, fixed expression on his

face, in which the whole temperament of each is summed up. One is inclined to say: No English actor could have done it. Perhaps; but then, no English stage-manager would have let them do it. They would have been told to move, to find "business," to indulge in gesture which would not come naturally to them. Again, in "Tartuffe," when, at the end, the hypocrite is exposed and led off to prison, Coquelin simply turns his back on the audience, and stands, with head sullenly down, making no movement; then, at the end, he turns half-round and walks straight off, on the nearer side of the stage, giving you no more than a momentary glimpse of a convulsed face, fixed into a definite, gross, raging mood. It would have taken Mr. Tree five minutes to get off the stage, and he would have walked to and fro with a very multiplication of gesture, trying on one face, so to speak, after another. Would it have been so effective, that is to say, so real?

A great part of the art of French acting consists in knowing when and how not to do

things. Their blood helps them, for there is movement in their blood, and they have something to restrain. But they have realised the art there is in being quite still, in speaking naturally, as people do when they are really talking, in fixing attention on the words they are saying and not on their antics while saying them. The other day, in the first act of "The Bishop's Move" at the Garrick, there is a Duchess talking to a young novice in the refectory of a French abbey. After standing talking to him for a few minutes, with only such movements as would be quite natural under the circumstances, she takes his arm, not once only but twice, and walks him up and down in front of the footlights, for no reason in the world except to "cross stage to right." The stage trick was so obvious that it deprived the scene at once of any pretence to reality.

The fact is, that we do not sufficiently realise the difference between what is dramatic and what is merely theatrical. Drama is made to be acted, and the finest "literary" play in the world, if it wholly fails to inter-

est people on the stage, will have wholly failed in its first and most essential aim. But the finer part of drama is implicit in the words and in the development of the play, and not in its separate small details of literal "action." Two people should be able to sit quietly in a room, without ever leaving their chairs, and to hold our attention breathless for as long as the playwright likes. Given a good play, French actors are able to do that. Given a good play, English actors are not allowed to do it.

Is it not partly the energy, the restless energy, of the English character which prevents our actors from ever sitting or standing still on the stage? We are a nation of travellers, of sailors, of business people; and all these have to keep for ever moving. Our dances are the most vigorous and athletic of dances, they carry us all over the stage, with all kinds of leaping and kicking movements. Our music-hall performers have invented a kind of clowning peculiar to this country, in which kicking and leaping are also a part of the business. Our melodramas are con-

structed on more movable planes, with more formidable collapses and collisions, than those of any other country. Is not, then, the persistent English habit of "crossing stage to right" a national characteristic, ingrained in us, and not only a matter of training? It is this reflection which hinders me from hoping, with much confidence, that a reform in stage-management will lead to a really quieter and simpler way of acting. But might not the experiment be tried? Might not some stage-manager come forward and say: "For heaven's sake stand still, my dear ladies and gentlemen, and see if you cannot interest your audience without moving more than twice the length of your own feet?"

## THE SPEAKING OF VERSE

Was there ever at any time an art, an acquired method, of speaking verse, as definite as the art and method of singing it? The Greeks, it has often been thought, had such a method, but we are still puzzling in vain over their choruses, and wondering how far they were sung, how far they were spoken. Wagner pointed out the probability that these choruses were written to fixed tunes, perhaps themselves the accompaniment to dances, because it can hardly be believed that poems of so meditative a kind could have themselves given rise to such elaborate and not apparently expressive rhythms. In later times there have been stage traditions, probably developed from the practice of some particular actor, many conflicting traditions; but, at the present day, there is not even a definite bad method, but mere chaos, individual caprice, in the speaking of verse

as a foolish monotonous tune or as a foolishly contorted species of prose.

An attempt has lately been made by Mr. Yeats, with the practical assistance of Mr. Dolmetsch and Miss Florence Farr, to revive or invent an art of speaking verse to a pitch sounded by a musical instrument. Mr. Dolmetsch has made instruments which he calls psalteries, and Miss Farr has herself learnt and has taught others, to chant verse, in a manner between speaking and singing, to the accompaniment of the psaltery. Mr. Yeats has written and talked and lectured on the subject; and the experiment has been tried in the performances of Mr. Gilbert Murray's translation of the "Hippolytus" of Euripides. Here, then, is the only definite attempt which has been made in our time to regulate the speech of actors in their speaking of verse. No problem of the theatre is more important, for it is only by the quality of the verse, and by the clearness, beauty, and expressiveness of its rendering, that a play of Shakespeare is to be distinguished, when we see it on the stage, from

any other melodrama. "I see no reason," says Lamb, in the profoundest essay which has ever been written on the acting of drama, "to think that if the play of Hamlet were written over again by some such writer as Banks or Lillo, retaining the process of the story, but totally omitting all the poetry of it, all the divine features of Shakespeare, his stupendous intellect; and only taking care to give us enough of passionate dialogue, which Banks or Lillo were never at a loss to furnish; I see not how the effect could be much different upon an audience, nor how the actor has it in his power to represent Shakespeare to us differently from his representation of Banks or Lillo." It is precisely by his speaking of that poetry, which one is accustomed to hear hurried over or turned into mere oratory, that the actor might, if he were conscious of the necessity of doing it, and properly trained to do it, bring before the audience what is essential in Shakespeare. Here, in the rendering of words, is the actor's first duty to his author, if he is to remember that a play is acted, not for

the exhibition of the actor, but for the realisation of the play. We should think little of the "dramatic effect" of a symphony, in which every individual note had not been given its precise value by every instrument in the orchestra. When do we ever, on the stage, see the slightest attempt, on the part of even the "solo" players, to give its precise value to every word of that poetry which is itself a not less elaborate piece of concerted music?

The two great dangers in the speaking of verse are the danger of over-emphasising the meaning and the danger of over-emphasising the sound. I was never more conscious of the former danger than when I heard a lecture given in London by M. Silvain, of the Comédie Francaise, on the art of speaking on the stage.

The method of M. Silvain (who, besides being an actor, is Professor of Declamation at the Conservatoire) is the method of the elocutionist, but of the elocutionist at his best. He has a large, round, vibrating voice, over which he has perfect command. "M.

Silvain," says M. Catulle Mendès, "est de ceux, bien rares au Théâtre Français, qu'on entend même lorsqu'ils parlent bas." He has trained his voice to do everything that he wants it to do; his whole body is full of life, energy, sensitiveness to the emotion of every word; his gestures seem to be at once spontaneous and calculated. He adores verse, for its own sake, as a brilliant executant adores his violin; he has an excellent contempt for prose, as an inferior form. In all his renderings of verse, he never forgot that it was at the same time speech, the direct expression of character, and also poetry, a thing with its own reasons for existence. He gave La Fontaine in one way, Molière in another, Victor Hugo in another, some poor modern verse in yet another. But in all there was the same attempt: to treat verse in the spirit of rhetoric, that is to say, to over-emphasise it consistently and for effect. In a tirade from Corneille's "Cinna," he followed the angry reasoning of the lines by counting on his fingers: one, two, three, as if he were underlining the important

words of each clause. The danger of this method is that it is apt to turn poetry into a kind of bad logic. There, precisely, is the danger of the French conception of poetry, and M. Silvain's method brings out the worst faults of that conception.

Now in speaking verse to musical notes, as Mr. Yeats would have us do, we are at least safe from this danger. Mr. Yeats, being a poet, knows that verse is first of all song. In purely lyrical verse, with which he is at present chiefly concerned, the verse itself has a melody which demands expression by the voice, not only when it is "set to music," but when it is said aloud. Every poet, when he reads his own verse, reads it with certain inflections of the voice, in what is often called a "sing-song" way, quite different from the way in which he would read prose. Most poets aim rather at giving the musical effect, and the atmosphere, the vocal atmosphere, of the poem, than at emphasising individual meanings. They give, in the musician's sense, a "reading" of the

poem, an interpretation of the poem as a composition. Mr. Yeats thinks that this kind of reading can be stereotyped, so to speak, the pitch noted down in musical notes, and reproduced with the help of a simple stringed instrument. By way of proof, Miss Farr repeated one of Mr. Yeats' lyrics, as nearly as possible in the way in which Mr. Yeats himself is accustomed to say it. She took the pitch from certain notes which she had written down, and which she struck on Mr. Dolmetsch's psaltery. Now Miss Farr has a beautiful voice, and a genuine feeling for the beauty of verse. She said the lines better than most people would have said them, but, to be quite frank, did she say them so as to produce the effect Mr. Yeats himself produces whenever he repeats those lines? The difference was fundamental. The one was a spontaneous thing, profoundly felt; the other, a deliberate imitation in which the fixing of the notes made any personal interpretation, good or bad, impossible.

I admit that the way in which most actors

speak verse is so deplorable that there is much to be said for a purely mechanical method, even if it should turn actors into little more than human phonographs. Many actors treat verse as a slightly more stilted kind of prose, and their main aim in saying it is to conceal from the audience the fact that it is not prose. They think of nothing but what they take to be the expression, and when they come to a passage of purely lyric quality they give it as if it were a quotation, having nothing to do with the rest of the speech. Anything is better than this haphazard way of misdoing things, either M. Silvain's oratory or the intoning into which Mr. Yeats' method would almost certainly drift. But I cannot feel that it is possible to do much good by a ready-made method of any kind. Let the actor be taught how to breathe, how to articulate, let his voice be trained to express what he wants to express, and then let him be made to feel something of what verse means by being verse. Let him, by all means, study one of Mr. Yeats' readings, interpreted to him by means of

notes; it will teach him to unlearn something and to learn something more. But then let him forget his notes and Mr. Yeats' method, if he is to make verse live on the stage.

## GREAT ACTING IN ENGLISH

WHY is it that we have at the present moment no great acting in England? We can remember it in our own time, in Irving, who was a man of individual genius. In him it was the expression of a romantic temperament, really Cornish, that is, Celtic, which had been cultivated like a rare plant, in a hothouse. Irving was an incomparable orchid, a thing beautiful, lonely, and not quite normal. We have one actress now living, an exception to every rule, in whom a rare and wandering genius comes and goes: I mean, of course, Mrs. Patrick Campbell. She enchants us, from time to time, with divine or magical improvisations. We have actresses who have many kinds of charm, actors who have many kinds of useful talent; but have we in our whole island two actors capable of giving so serious, so intelligent, so carefully finished, so vital an interpretation of Shakespeare, or, indeed, of render-

ing any form of poetic drama on the stage, as the Englishman and Englishwoman who came to us in 1907 from America, in the guise of Americans: Julia Marlowe and Edward Sothern?

The business of the manager, who in most cases is also the chief actor, is to produce a concerted action between his separate players, as the conductor does between the instruments in his orchestra. If he does not bring them entirely under his influence, if he (because, like the conductor of a pothouse band, he himself is the first fiddle) does not subordinate himself as carefully to the requirements of the composition, the result will be worthless as a whole, no matter what individual talents may glitter out of it. What should we say if the first fiddle insisted on having a cadenza to himself in the course of every dozen bars of the music? What should we say if he cut the best parts of the 'cellos, in order that they might not add a mellowness which would slightly veil the acuteness of his own notes? What should we say if he rearranged the composer's

score for the convenience of his own orchestra? What should we say if he left out a beautiful passage on the horn because he had not got one of the two or three perfectly accomplished horn-players in Europe? What should we say if he altered the time of one movement in order to make room for another, in which he would himself be more prominent? What should we say if the conductor of an orchestra committed a single one of these criminal absurdities? The musical public would rise against him as one man, the pedantic critics and the young men who smoke as they stand on promenade floors. And yet this, nothing more nor less, is done on the stage of the theatre whenever a Shakespeare play, or any serious work of dramatic art, is presented with any sort of public appeal.

In the case of music, fortunately, something more than custom forbids: the nature of music forbids. But the play is at the mercy of the actor-manager, and the actor-manager has no mercy. In England a serious play, above all a poetic play, is not

put on by any but small, unsuccessful, more or less private and unprofessional people with any sort of reverence for art, beauty, or, indeed, for the laws and conditions of the drama which is literature as well as drama. Personal vanity and the pecuniary necessity of long runs are enough in themselves to account for the failure of most attempts to combine Shakespeare with show, poetry with the box-office. Or is there in our actor-managers a lack of this very sense of what is required in the proper rendering of imaginative work on the stage?

It is in the staging and acting, the whole performance and management, of such typical plays of Shakespeare as "Hamlet," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Twelfth Night" that Mr. Sothern and Miss Marlowe have shown the whole extent of their powers, and have read us the lesson we most needed. The mission of these two guests has been to show us what we have lost on our stage and what we have forgotten in our Shakespeare. And first of all I would note the extraordinary novelty and life which they give to each play

as a whole by their way of setting it in action. I have always felt that a play of Shakespeare, seen on the stage, should give one the same kind of impression as when one is assisting at "a solemn music." The rhythm of Shakespeare's art is not fundamentally different from that of Beethoven, and "Romeo and Juliet" is a suite, "Hamlet" a symphony. To act either of these plays with whatever qualities of another kind, and to fail in producing this musical rhythm from beginning to end, is to fail in the very foundation. Here the music was unflawed; there were no digressions, no eccentricities, no sacrifice to the actor. This astonishing thing occurred: that a play was presented for its own sake, with reverence, not with ostentation; for Shakespeare's sake, not for the actor-manager's.

And from this intelligent, unostentatious way of giving Shakespeare there come to us, naturally, many lessons. Until I saw this performance of "Romeo and Juliet" I thought there was rhetoric in the play, as well as the natural poetry of drama. But

I see that it only needs to be acted with genius and intelligence, and the poetry consumes the rhetoric. I never knew before that this play was so near to life, or that every beauty in it could be made so inevitably human. And this is because no one else has rendered, with so deep a truth, with so beautiful a fidelity, all that is passionate and desperate and an ecstatic agony in this tragic love which glorifies and destroys Juliet. The decorative Juliet of the stage we know, the lovely picture, the *ingénue,* the prattler of pretty phrases; but this mysterious, tragic child, whom love has made wise in making her a woman, is unknown to us outside Shakespeare, and perhaps even there. Mr. Sothern's Romeo has an exquisite passion, young and extravagant as a lover's, and is alive. But Miss Marlowe is not only lovely and pathetic as Juliet; she is Juliet. I would not say that Mr. Sothern's Hamlet is the only Hamlet, for there are still, no doubt, "points in Hamlet's soul unseized by the Germans yet." Yet what a Hamlet! How majestical, how simple, how

much a poet and a gentleman! To what depth he suffers! How magnificently he interprets, in the crucifixion of his own soul, the main riddles of the universe! In "Hamlet," too, I saw deeper meanings than I had ever seen in the play when it was acted. Mr. Sothern was the only quite sane Hamlet; his madness is all the outer coverings of wisdom; there was nothing fantastic in his grave, subdued, powerful, and piteous representation, in which no symbol, no metaphysical Faust, no figment of a German brain, loomed before us, but a man, more to be pitied and not less to be honoured than any man in Elsinore. I have seen romantic, tragic, exceptional Hamlets, the very bells on the cap of "Fortune's fool." But at last I have seen the man himself, as Shakespeare saw him living, a gentleman, as well as a philosopher, a nature of fundamental sincerity; no melancholy clown, but the greatest of all critics of life. And the play, with its melodrama and its lyrical ecstasy, moved before one's eyes like a religious service.

How is it that we get from the acting and management of these two actors a result which no one in England has ever been able to get? Well, in the first place, as I have said, they have the odd caprice of preferring Shakespeare to themselves; the odd conviction that fidelity to Shakespeare will give them the best chance of doing great things themselves. Nothing is accidental, everything obeys a single intention; and what, above all, obeys that intention is the quality of inspiration, which is never absent and never uncontrolled. Intention without the power of achievement is almost as lamentable a thing as achievement not directed by intention. Now here are two players in whom technique has been carried to a supreme point. There is no actor on our stage who can speak either English or verse as these two American actors can. It is on this preliminary technique, this power of using speech as one uses the notes of a musical instrument, that all possibility of great acting depends. Who is there that can give us, not the external gesture, but the inner mean-

ing, of some beautiful and subtle passage in Shakespeare? One of our actors will give it sonorously, as rhetoric, and another eagerly, as passionate speech, but no one with the precise accent of a man who is speaking his thoughts, which is what Shakespeare makes his characters do when he puts his loveliest poetry into their mouths. Look at Mr. Sothern when he gives the soliloquy "To be or not to be," which we are accustomed to hear spoken to the public in one or another of many rhetorical manners. Mr. Sothern's Hamlet curls himself up in a chair, exactly as sensitive reflective people do when they want to make their bodies comfortable before setting their minds to work; and he lets you overhear his thoughts. Every soliloquy of Shakespeare is meant to be overheard, and just so casually. To render this on the stage requires, first, an understanding of what poetry is; next, a perfect capacity of producing by the sound and intonation of the voice the exact meaning of those words and cadences. Who is there on our stage who has completely mastered those two first

requirements of acting? No one now acting in English, except Julia Marlowe and Edward Sothern.

What these two players do is to give us, not the impression which we get when we see and admire fine limitations, but the impression which we get from real people who, when they speak in verse, seem to be speaking merely the language of their own hearts. They give us every character in the round, whereas with our actors we see no more than profiles. Look, for contrast, at the Malvolio of Mr. Sothern. It is an elaborate travesty, done in a disguise like the solemn dandy's head of Disraeli. He acts with his eyelids, which move while all the rest of the face is motionless; with his pursed, reticent mouth, with his prim and pompous gestures; with that self-consciousness which brings all Malvolio's troubles upon him. It is a fantastic, tragically comic thing, done with rare calculation, and it has its formal, almost cruel share in the immense gaiety of the piece. The play is great and wild, a mockery and a happiness; and it is

all seen and not interpreted, but the mystery of it deepened, in the clown's song at the end, which, for once, has been allowed its full effect, not theatrical, but of pure imagination.

So far I have spoken only of those first requirements, those elementary principles of acting, which we ought to be able to take for granted; only in England, we cannot. These once granted, the individual work of the actor begins, his power to create with the means at his disposal. Let us look, then, a little more closely at Miss Marlowe. I have spoken of her Juliet, which is no doubt her finest part. But now look at her Ophelia. It is not, perhaps, so great a triumph as her Juliet, and merely for the reason that there is little in Ophelia but an image of some beautiful bright thing broken. Yet the mad scene will be remembered among all other renderings for its edged lightness, the quite simple poetry it makes of madness; above all, the natural pity which comes into it from a complete abandonment to what is essence, and not mere decoration, in the spoiled brain

of this kind, loving and will-less woman. She suffers, and is pitifully unaware of it, there before you, the very soul naked and shameless with an innocence beyond innocence. She makes the rage and tenderness of Hamlet towards her a credible thing.

In Juliet Miss Marlowe is ripe humanity, in Ophelia that same humanity broken down from within. As Viola in "Twelfth Night" she is the woman let loose, to be bewitching in spite of herself; and here again her art is tested, and triumphs, for she is bewitching, and never trespasses into jauntiness on the one hand, or, on the other, into that modern sentiment which the theatre has accustomed itself to under the name of romance. She is serious, with a calm and even simplicity, to which everything is a kind of child's play, putting no unnecessary pathos into a matter destined to come right in the end. And so her delicate and restrained gaiety in masquerade interprets perfectly, satisfies every requirement, of what for the moment is whimsical in Shakespeare's art.

Now turn from Shakespeare, and see what

can be done with the modern make-believe. Here, in "Jeanne d'Arc," is a recent American melodrama, written ambitiously, in verse which labours to be poetry. The subject was made for Miss Marlowe, but the play was made for effect, and it is lamentable to see her, in scenes made up of false sentiment and theatrical situations, trying to do what she is ready and able to do; what, indeed, some of the scenes give her the chance to be: the little peasant girl, perplexed by visions and possessed by them, and also the peasant saint, too simple to know that she is heroic. Out of a play of shreds and patches one remembers only something which has given it its whole value: the vital image of a divine child, a thing of peace and love, who makes war angelically.

Yet even in this play there was ambition and an aim. Turn, last of all, to a piece which succeeded with London audiences better than Shakespeare, a burlesque of American origin, called "When Knighthood was in Flower." Here too I seemed to discern a lesson for the English stage. Even through

the silly disguises of this inconceivable production, which pleased innocent London as it had pleased indifferent New York, one felt a certain lilt and go, a touch of nature among the fool's fabric of the melodrama, which set the action far above our steady practitioners in the same art of sinking. And, above all, a sense of parody pierced through words and actions, commenting wittily on the nonsense of romance which so many were so willing to take seriously. She was a live thing, defiantly and gaily conscious of every absurdity with which she indulged the babyish tastes of one more public.

An actor or actress who is limited by talent, personality, or preference to a single kind of *rôle* is not properly an artist at all. It is the curse of success that, in any art, a man who has pleased the public in any single thing is called upon, if he would turn it into money, to repeat it, as exactly as he can, as often as he can. If he does so, he is, again, not an artist. It is the business of every kind of artist to be ceaselessly creative, and, above all, not to repeat himself. When I

have seen Miss Marlowe as Juliet, as Ophelia, and as Viola, I am content to have seen her also in a worthless farce, because she showed me that she could go without vulgarity, lightly, safely, through a part that she despised: she did not spoil it out of self-respect; out of a rarer self-respect she carried it through without capitulating to it. Then I hear of her having done Lady Teazle and Imogen, the Fiammetta of Catulle Mendès and the Salome of Hauptmann; I do not know even the names of half the parts she has played, but I can imagine her playing them all, not with the same poignancy and success, but with a skill hardly varying from one to another. There is no doubt that she has a natural genius for acting. This genius she has so carefully and so subtly trained that it may strike you at first sight as not being genius at all; because it is so much on the level, because there are no fits and starts in it; because, in short, it has none of the attractiveness of excess. It is by excess that we for the most part distinguish what seems to us genius; and it is

often by its excess that genius first really shows itself. But the rarest genius is without excess, and may seem colourless in his perfection, as Giorgione seems beside Titian. But Giorgione will always be the greater.

I quoted to an old friend and fervent admirer of Miss Marlowe the words of Bacon which were always on the lips of Poe and of Baudelaire, about the "strangeness in the proportions" of all beauty. She asked me, in pained surprise, if I saw anything strange in Miss Marlowe. If I had not, she would have meant nothing for me, as the "faultily faultless" person, the Mrs. Kendal, means nothing to me. The confusion can easily be made, and there will probably always be people who will prefer Mrs. Kendal to Miss Marlowe, as there are those who will think Mme. Melba a greater operatic singer than Mme. Calvé. What Miss Marlowe has is a great innocence, which is not, like Duse's, the innocence of wisdom, and a childish and yet wild innocence, such as we might find in a tamed wild beast, in whom there would al-

ways be a charm far beyond that of the domestic creature who has grown up on our hearth. This wildness comes to her perhaps from Pan, forces of nature that are always somewhere stealthily about the world, hidden in the blood, unaccountable, unconscious; without which we are tame christened things, fit for cloisters. Duse is the soul made flesh, Réjane the flesh made Parisian, Sarah Bernhardt the flesh and the devil; but Julia Marlowe is the joy of life, the plenitude of sap in the tree.

The personal appeal of Mr. Sothern and of Miss Marlowe is very different. In his manner of receiving applause there is something almost resentful, as if, being satisfied to do what he chooses to do, and in his own way, he were indifferent to the opinion of others. It is not the actor's attitude; but what a relief from the general subservience of that attitude! In Miss Marlowe there is something young, warm, and engaging, a way of giving herself wholly to the pleasure of pleasing, to which the footlights are scarcely a barrier. As if unconsciously, she

fills and gladdens you with a sense of the single human being whom she is representing. And there is her strange beauty, in which the mind and the senses have an equal part, and which is full of savour and grace, alive to the finger-tips. Yet it is not with these personal qualities that I am here chiefly concerned. What I want to emphasise is the particular kind of lesson which this acting, so essentially English, though it comes to us as if set free by America, should have for all who are at all seriously considering the lamentable condition of our stage in the present day. We have nothing like it in England, nothing on the same level, no such honesty and capacity of art, no such worthy results. Are we capable of realising the difference? If not, Julia Marlowe and Edward Sothern will have come to England in vain.

## A THEORY OF THE STAGE

Life and beauty are the body and soul of great drama. Mix the two as you will, so long as both are there, resolved into a single substance. But let there be, in the making, two ingredients, and while one is poetry, and comes bringing beauty, the other is a violent thing which has been scornfully called melodrama, and is the emphasis of action. The greatest plays are melodrama by their skeleton, and poetry by the flesh which clothes that skeleton.

The foundation of drama is that part of the action which can be represented in dumb show. Only the essential parts of action can be represented without words, and you would set the puppets vainly to work on any material but that which is common to humanity. The permanence of a drama might be tested by the continuance and universality of its appeal when played silently in gestures. I have seen the test applied.

Companies of marionette players still go about the villages of Kent, and among their stock pieces is "Arden of Feversham," the play which Shakespeare is not too great to have written, at some moment when his right hand knew not what his left hand was doing. Well, that great little play can hold the eyes of every child and villager, as the puppets enact it; and its power has not gone out of it after three centuries. Dumb show apes the primal forces of nature, and is inarticulate, as they are; until relief gives words. When words come, there is no reason why they should not be in verse, for only in verse can we render what is deepest in humanity of the utmost beauty. Nothing but beauty should exist on the stage. Visible beauty comes with the ballet, an abstract thing; gesture adds pantomime, with which drama begins; and then words bring in the speech by which life tries to tell its secret. Because poetry, speaking its natural language of verse, can let out more of that secret than prose, the great drama of the past has been mainly drama in verse. The

modern desire to escape from form, and to get at a raw thing which shall seem like what we know of the outside of nature, has led our latest dramatists to use prose in preference to verse, which indeed is more within their limits. It is Ibsen who has seemed to do most to justify the use of prose, for he carries his psychology far with it. Yet it remains prose, a meaner method, a limiting restraint, and his drama a thing less fundamental than the drama of the poets. Only one modern writer has brought something which is almost the equivalent of poetry out of prose speech: Tolstoi, in "The Powers of Darkness." The play is horrible and uncouth, but it is illuminated by a great inner light. There is not a beautiful word in it, but it is filled with beauty. And that is because Tolstoi has the vision which may be equally that of the poet and of the prophet.

It is often said that the age of poetry is over, and that the great forms of the future must be in prose. That is the "exquisite reason" of those whom the gods have not made poetical. It is like saying that there

will be no more music, or that love is out of date. Forms change, but not essence; and Whitman points the way, not to prose, but to a poetry which shall take in wider regions of the mind.

Yet, though it is by its poetry that, as Lamb pointed out, a play of Shakespeare differs from a play of Banks or Lillo, the poetry is not more essential to its making than the living substance, the melodrama. Poets who have written plays for reading have wasted their best opportunities. Why wear chains for dancing? The limitations necessary to the drama before it can be fitted to the stage are but hindrances and disabilities to the writer of a book. Where can we find more spilt wealth than in the plays of Swinburne, where all the magnificent speech builds up no structure, but wavers in orchestral floods, without beginning or ending? It has been said that Shakespeare will sacrifice his drama to his poetry, and even "Hamlet" has been quoted against him. But let "Hamlet" be rightly acted, and whatever has seemed mere lingering medi-

tation will be recognised as a part of that thought which makes or waits on action. If poetry in Shakespeare may sometimes seem to delay action, it does but deepen it. The poetry is the life blood, or runs through it. Only bad actors and managers think that by stripping the flesh from the skeleton they can show us a more living body. The outlines of "Hamlet" are crude, irresistible melodrama, still irresistible to the gallery; and the greatness of the play, though it comes to us by means of the poetry, comes to us legitimately, as a growth out of melodrama.

The failure, the comparative failure, of every contemporary dramatist, however far he may go in one direction or another, comes from his neglect of one or another of these two primary and essential requirements. There is, at this time, a more serious dramatic movement in Germany than in any other country; with mechanicians, like Sudermann, as accomplished as the best of ours, and dramatists who are also poets, like Hauptmann. I do not know them well

enough to bring them into my argument, but I can see that in Germany, whatever the actual result, the endeavour is in the right direction. Elsewhere, how often do we find even so much as this, in more than a single writer here and there? Consider Ibsen, who is the subtlest master of the stage since Sophocles. At his best he has a firm hold on structural melodrama, he is a marvellous analyst of life, he is the most ingenious of all the playwrights; but ask him for beauty and he will give you a phrase, "vine-leaves in the hair" or its equivalent; one of the clichés of the minor poet. In the end beauty revenged itself upon him by bringing him to a no-man's land where there were clouds and phantasms that he could no longer direct.

Maeterlinck began by a marvellous instinct, with plays "for marionettes," and, having discovered a forgotten secret, grew tired of limiting himself within its narrow circle, and came outside his magic. "Monna Vanna" is an attempt to be broadly human on the part of a man whose gift is of an-

other kind: a visionary of the moods. His later speech, like his later dramatic material, is diluted; he becomes, in the conventional sense, eloquent, which poetry never is. But he has brought back mystery to the stage, which has been banished, or retained in exile, among phantasmagoric Faust-lights. The dramatist of the future will have more to learn from Maeterlinck than from any other playwright of our time. He has seen his puppets against the permanent darkness, which we had cloaked with light; he has given them supreme silences.

In d'Annunzio we have an art partly shaped by Maeterlinck, in which all is atmosphere, and a home for sensations which never become vital passions. The roses in the sarcophagus are part of the action in "Francesca," and in "The Dead City" the whole action arises out of the glorious mischief hidden like a deadly fume in the grave of Agamemnon. Speech and drama are there, clothing but not revealing one another; the speech always a lovely veil, never a human outline.

We have in England one man, and one

only, who has some public claim to be named with these artists, though his aim is the negation of art. Mr. Shaw is a mind without a body, a whimsical intelligence without a soul. He is one of those tragic buffoons who play with eternal things, not only for the amusement of the crowd, but because an uneasy devil capers in their own brains. He is a merry preacher, a petulant critic, a great talker. It is partly because he is an Irishman that he has transplanted the art of talking to the soil of the stage: Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw, our only modern comedians, all Irishmen, all talkers. It is by his astonishing skill of saying everything that comes into his head, with a spirit really intoxicating, that Mr. Shaw has succeeded in holding the stage with undramatic plays, in which there is neither life nor beauty. Life gives up its wisdom only to reverence, and beauty is jealous of neglected altars. But those who amuse the world, no matter by what means, have their place in the world at any given moment. Mr. Shaw is a clock striking the hour.

With Mr. Shaw we come to the play

which is prose, and nothing but prose. The form is familiar among us, though it is cultivated with a more instinctive skill, as is natural, in France. There was a time, not so long ago, when Dumas fils was to France what Ibsen afterwards became to Europe. What remains of him now is hardly more than his first "fond adventure" the supremely playable "Dame aux Camélias." The other plays are already out of date, since Ibsen; the philosophy of "Tue-là!" was the special pleading of the moment, and a drama in which special pleading, and not the fundamental "criticism of life," is the dramatic motive can never outlast its technique, which has also died with the coming of Ibsen. Better technique, perhaps, than that of "La Femme de Claude," but with less rather than more weight of thought behind it, is to be found in many accomplished playwrights, who are doing all sorts of interesting temporary things, excellently made to entertain the attentive French public with a solid kind of entertainment. Here, in England, we have no such folk to com-

mand; our cleverest playwrights, apart from Mr. Shaw, are what we might call practitioners. There is Mr. Pinero, Mr. Jones, Mr. Grundy: what names are better known, or less to be associated with literature? There is Anthony Hope, who can write, and Mr. Barrie who has something both human and humourous. There are many more names, if I could remember them; but where is the serious playwright? Who is there that can be compared with our poets or our novelists, not only with a Swinburne or a Meredith, but, in a younger generation, with a Bridges or a Conrad? The Court Theatre has given us one or two good realistic plays, the best being Mr. Granville Barker's, besides giving Mr. Shaw his chance in England, after he had had and taken it in America. But is there, anywhere but in Ireland, an attempt to write imaginative literature in the form of drama? The Irish Literary Theatre has already, in Mr. Yeats and Mr. Synge, two notable writers, each wholly individual, one a poet in verse, the other a poet in prose. Neither has yet reached the pub-

lic, in any effectual way, or perhaps the limits of his own powers as a dramatist. Yet who else is there for us to hope in, if we are to have once more an art of the stage, based on the great principles, and a theatre in which that art can be acted?

The whole universe lies open to the poet who is also a dramatist, affording him an incomparable choice of subject. Ibsen, the greatest of the playwrights of modern life, narrowed his stage, for ingenious plausible reasons of his own, to the four walls of a house, and, at his best, constrained his people to talk of nothing above their daily occupations. He got the illusion of everyday life, but at a cruel expense. These people, until they began to turn crazy, had no vision beyond their eyesight, and their thoughts never went deep enough to need a better form for expression than they could find in their newspapers. They discussed immortal problems as they would have discussed the entries in their ledger. Think for a moment how the peasants speak in that play of Tolstoi's which I have called the

only modern play in prose which contains poetry. They speak as Russians speak, with a certain childishness, in which they are more primitive than our more civilised peasants. But the speech comes from deeper than they are aware, it stumbles into a revelation of the soul. A drunken man in Tolstoi has more wisdom in his cups than all Ibsen's strange ladies who fumble at their lips for sea-magic.

And as Tolstoi found in this sordid chaos material for tragedy which is as noble as the Greeks' (a like horror at the root of both, a like radiance at both summits), so the poet will find stories, as modern as this if he chooses, from which he can take the same ingredients for his art. The ingredients are unchanging since "Prometheus"; no human agony has ever grown old or lost its pity and terror. The great plays of the past were made out of great stories, and the great stories are repeated in our days and can be heard wherever an old man tells us a little of what has come to him in living. Verse lends itself to the lifting and adequate treat-

ment of the primary emotions, because it can render them more as they are in the soul, not being tied down to probable words, as prose talk is. The probable words of prose talk can only render a part of what goes on among the obscure imageries of the inner life; for who, in a moment of crisis, responds to circumstances or destiny with an adequate answer? Poetry, which is spoken thought, or the speech of something deeper than thought, may let loose some part of that answer which would justify the soul, if it did not lie dumb upon its lips.

# THE SICILIAN ACTORS

## I

I HAVE been seeing the Sicilian actors in London. They came here from Paris, where, I read, "la passion paraît décidement," to a dramatic critic, "avoir partout ses inconvenients," especially on the stage. We are supposed to think so here, but for once London has applauded an acting which is more primitively passionate than anything we are accustomed to on our moderate stage. Some of it was spoken in Italian, some in the Sicilian dialect, and not many in the English part of the audience could follow very closely the words as they were spoken. Yet so marvellously real were these stage peasants, so clear and poignant their gestures and actions, that words seemed a hardly needless accompaniment to so evident, exciting, and absorbing a form of

drama. It was a new intoxication, and people went, I am afraid, as to a wild-beast show.

It was really nothing of the kind, though the melodrama was often very crude; sometimes, in a simple way, horrible. But it was a fierce living thing, a life unknown to us in the North; it smouldered like the volcanoes of the South. And so we were seeing a new thing on the stage, rendered by actors who seemed, for the most part, scarcely actors at all, but the real peasants; and, above all, there was a woman of genius, the leader of the company, who was much more real than reality.

Mimi Aguglia has studied Duse, for her tones, for some of her attitudes; her art is more nearly the art of Réjane. While both of these are great artists, she is an improviser, a creature of wild moods, of animal energies, uncontrolled, spontaneous. She catches you in a fierce caress, like a tiger-cat. She gives you, as in "Malia," the whole animal, snarling, striking, suffering, all the pangs of the flesh, the emotions of

fear and hate, but for the most part no more. In "La Folfaa" she can be piquant, passing from the naughty girl of the first act, with her delicious airs and angers, her tricks, gambols, petulances, to the soured wife of the second, in whom a kind of bad blood comes out, turning her to treacheries of mere spite, until her husband thrusts her brutally out of the house, where, if she will, she may follow her lover. Here, where there is no profound passion but mean quarrels among miserable workers in salt-mines, she is a noticeable figure, standing out from the others, and setting her prim, soubrette figure in motion with a genuine art, quite personal to her. But to see her after the Santuzza of Duse, in Verga's "Cavalleria Rusticana," is to realise the difference between this art of the animal and Duse's art of the soul. And if one thinks of Réjane's "Sapho," the difference is hardly less, though of another kind. I saw Duse for the first time in the part of Santuzza, and I remember to this day a certain gentle and pathetic gesture of her apparently uncon-

scious hand, turning back the sleeve of her lover's coat over his wrist, while her eyes fasten on his eyes in a great thirst for what is to be found in them. The Santuzza of Mimi Aguglia is a stinging thing that bites when it is stepped on. There is no love in her heart, only love of possession, jealousy, an unreasonable hate; and she is not truly pathetic or tragic in her furious wrestle with her lover on the church steps or in her plot against him which sends an unanticipated knife into his heart.

Yet, in the Mila di Codra of d'Annunzio's "Figlia di Jorio" she has moments of absolute greatness. Her fear in the cave, before Lazaro di Roio, is the most ghastly and accurate rendering of that sensation that, I am sure, has been seen on any stage. She flings herself upright against a frame of wood on which the woodcarver has left his tools, and as one new shudder after another sets her body visibly quaking, some of the tools drop on the floor, with an astonishing effect on the nerves. Her face contracts into a staring, hopeless grimace, as if about

to utter shrieks which cannot get past her lips. She shivers slowly downwards until she sinks on her rigid heels and clasps her knees with both arms. There, in the corner, she waits in twenty several anguishes, while the foul old man tempts her, crawling like a worm, nearer and nearer to her on the ground, with gestures of appeal that she repels time after time, with some shudder aside of her crouched body, hopping as if on all fours closer into the corner. The scene is terrible in its scarcely thinkable distress, but it is not horrible, as some would have it to be. Here, with her means, this actress creates; it is no mean copy of reality, but fear brought to a kind of greatness, so completely has the whole being passed into its possession.

And there is another scene in which she is absolute in a nobler catastrophe. In her last cry before she is dragged to the stake, "La fiamma e bella! la fiamma e bella!" d'Annunzio, I have no doubt, meant no more than the obvious rhetoric suited to a situation of heroism. Out of his rhetoric this

woman has created the horror and beauty of a supreme irony of anguish. She has given up her life for her lover, he has denied and cursed her in the oblivion of the draught that should have been his death-drink, her hands have been clasped with the wooden fetters taken off from his hands, and her face covered with the dark veil he had worn, and the vile howling crowd draws her backward towards her martyrdom. Ornella has saluted her sister in Christ; she, the one who knows the truth, silent, helping her to die nobly. And now the woman, having willed beyond the power of mortal flesh to endure an anguish that now flames before her in its supreme reality, strains in the irrationality of utter fear backward into the midst of those clutching hands that are holding her up in the attitude of her death, and, with a shiver in which the soul, succumbing to the body, wrings its last triumph out of an ignominious glory, she cries, shrieking, feeling the flames eternally upon her: "La fiamma e bella! la fiamma e bella!" and thereat all evil seems to have been judged

suddenly, and obliterated, as if God had laughed once, and wiped out the world.

II

Since Charles Lamb's essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation," there has been a great deal of argument as to whether the beauty of words, especially in verse, is necessarily lost on the stage, and whether a well-constructed play cannot exist by itself, either in dumb show or with words in a foreign languge, which we may not understand. The acting, by the Sicilian actors, of "La Figlia di Jorio," seemed to me to do something towards the solution of part at least of this problem.

The play, as one reads it, has perhaps less than usual of the beauty which d'Annunzio elaborates in his dramatic speech. It is, on the other hand, closer to nature, carefully copied from the speech of the peasants of the Abruzzi, and from what remains of their folk-lore. The story on which it is founded is a striking one, and the action has, even in

reading, the effect of a melodrama. Now see it on the stage, acted with the speed and fury of these actors. Imagine oneself ignorant of the language and of the play. Suddenly the words have become unnecessary; the bare outlines stand out, perfectly explicit in gesture and motion; the scene passes before you as if you were watching it in real life; and this primitively passionate acting, working on an action so cunningly contrived for its co-operation, gives us at last what the play, as we read it, had suggested to us, but without complete conviction. The beauty of the speech had become a secondary matter, or, if we did not understand it, the desire to know what was being said: the playwright and his players had eclipsed the poet, the visible action had put out the calculated cadences of the verse. And the play, from the point of view of the stage, had fulfilled every requirement, had achieved its aim.

And still the question remains: how much of this success is due to the playwright's skill or to the skill of the actors?

How is it that in this play the actors obtain a fine result, act on a higher level, than in their realistic Sicilian tragedies? D'Annunzio is no doubt a better writer than Capuana or Verga, and his play is finer as literature than "Cavalleria Rusticana" or "Malia." But is it great poetry or great drama, and has the skilful playwright need of the stage and of actors like these, who come with their own life and ways upon it, in order to bring the men and women of his pages to life? Can it be said of him that he has fulfilled the great condition of poetic drama, that, as Coleridge said, "dramatic poetry must be poetry hid in thought and passion—not thought or passion disguised in the dress of poetry?"

That is a question which I am not here concerned to answer. Perhaps I have already answered it. Perhaps Lamb had answered it when he said, of a performance of Shakespeare in which there were two great actors, that "it seemed to embody and realise conceptions which had hitherto assumed no distinct shape," but that, "when

the novelty is past, we find to our cost that instead of realising an idea, we have only materialised and brought down a fine vision to the standard of flesh and blood." If that is true of Shakespeare, the greatest of dramatic poets, how far is it from the impression which I have described in speaking of d'Annunzio. What fine vision was there to bring down? what poetry hid in thought or passion was lost to us in its passage across the stage?

And now let us consider the play in which these actors have found their finest opportunity for abandoning themselves to those instincts out of which they have made their art. "Malia," a Sicilian play of Capuana, is an exhibition of the witchcraft of desire, and it is justified against all accusation by that thrill with which something in us responds to it, admitting: This is I, myself, so it has been given to me to sin and to suffer. And so, if we think deeply enough we shall find, in these sinning, suffering, insatiable beings, who present themselves as if naked before us, the image of our own

souls, visible for once, and unashamed, in the mirror of these bodies. It is we, who shudder before them, and maybe laugh at the extravagance of their gestures, it is ourselves whom they are showing to us, caught unawares and set in symbolical action. Let not the base word realism be used for this spontaneous energy by which we are shown the devastating inner forces, by which nature creates and destroys us. Here is one part of life, the source of its existence: and here it is shown us crude as nature, absolute as art. This new, living art of the body, which we see struggling in the clay of Rodin, concentrates itself for once in this woman who expresses, without reticence and without offence, all that the poets have ever said of the supreme witchcraft, animal desire, without passion, carnal, its own self-devouring agony. Art has for once justified itself by being mere nature.

And, here again, this play is no masterpiece in itself, only the occasion for a masterpiece of acting. The whole company, Sig. Grasso and the others, acted

with perfect unanimity, singly and in crowds. What stage-crowd of a hundred drilled and dumpish people, as we see it at our big theatres, has ever given us that sense of a real, surging crowd as the dozen or so supers in that last struggle which ends the play? But the play really existed for Aguglia, and was made by her. Réjane has done greater things in her own way, in her own way she is a greater artist. But not even Réjane has given us the whole animal, in its self-martyrdom, as this woman has given it to us. Such knowledge and command of the body, and so frank an abandonment to its instinctive motions, has never been seen on our stage, not even in Sada Yacco and the Japanese. They could outdo Sarah in a death-scene, but not Aguglia in the scene in which she betrays her secret. Done by anyone else, it would have been an imitation of a woman in hysterics, a thing meaningless and disgusting. Done by her, it was the visible contest between will and desire, a battle, a shipwreck, in which you watch helplessly from the shore every

plank as the sea tears if off and swallows it. "I feel as if I had died," said the friend who was with me in the theatre, speaking out of an uncontrollable sympathy; died with the woman, she meant, or in the woman's place.

Our critics here have for the most part seen fit, like the French critic whom I quoted at the beginning, to qualify their natural admiration by a hesitating consciousness that "la passion paraît decidement avoir partout ses inconvenients." But the critic who sets himself against a magnetic current can do no more than accept the shock which has cast him gently aside. All art is magnetism. The greatest art is a magnetism through which the soul reaches the soul. There is another, terrible, authentic art through which the body communicates its thrilling secrets. And against all these currents there is no barrier and no appeal.

# MUSIC

## ON WRITING ABOUT MUSIC

THE reason why music is so much more difficult to write about than any other art, is because music is the one absolutely disembodied art, when it is heard, and no more than a proposition of Euclid, when it is written. It is wholly useless, to the student no less than to the general reader, to write about music in the style of the programmes for which we pay sixpence at the concerts. "Repeated by flute and oboe, with accompaniment for clarionet (in triplets) and strings *pizzicato,* and then worked up by the full orchestra, this melody is eventually allotted to the 'cellos, its accompaniment now taking the form of chromatic passages," and so forth. Not less useless is it to write a rhapsody which has nothing to do with the notes, and to present this as an interpretation of what the notes have said in an unknown language. Yet what method is there besides

these two methods? None, indeed, that can ever be wholly satisfactory; at the best, no more than a compromise.

In writing about poetry, while precisely that quality which makes it poetry must always evade expression, there yet remain the whole definite meaning of the words, and the whole easily explicable technique of the verse, which can be made clear to every reader. In painting, you have the subject of the picture, and you have the colour, handling, and the like, which can be expressed hardly less precisely in words. But music has no subject, outside itself; no meaning, outside its meaning as music; and, to understand anything of what is meant by its technique, a certain definite technical knowledge is necessary in the reader. What subterfuges are required, in order to give the vaguest suggestion of what a piece of music is like, and how little has been said, after all, beyond generalisations, which would apply equally to half a dozen different pieces! The composer himself, if you ask him, will tell you that you may be quite correct in

what you say, but that he has no opinion in the matter.

Music has indeed a language, but it is a language in which birds and other angels may talk, but out of which we cannot translate their meaning. Emotion itself, how changed becomes even emotion when we transport it into a new world, in which only sound has feeling! But I am speaking as if it had died and been re-born there, whereas it was born in its own region, and is wholly ignorant of ours.

## TECHNIQUE AND THE ARTIST

TECHNIQUE and the artist: that is a question, of interest to the student of every art, which was brought home to me with unusual emphasis the other afternoon, as I sat in the Queen's Hall, and listened to Ysaye and Busoni. Are we always quite certain what we mean when we speak of an artist? Have we quite realised in our own minds the extent to which technique must go to the making of an artist, and the point at which something else must be superadded? That is a matter which I often doubt, and the old doubt came back to my mind the other afternoon, as I listened to Ysaye and Busoni, and next day, as I turned over the newspapers.

I read, in the first paper I happen to take up, that the violinist and the pianist are "a perfectly matched pair"; the applause, at the concert, was even more enthusiastic for Busoni than for Ysaye. I hear both spoken

of as artists, as great artists; and yet, if words have any meaning, it seems to me that only one of the two is an artist at all, and the other, with all his ability, only an executant. Admit, for a moment, that the technique of the two is equal, though it is not quite possible to admit even that, in the strictest sense. So far, we have made only a beginning. Without technique, perfect of its kind, no one is worth consideration in any art. The rope-dancer or the acrobat must be perfect in technique before he appears on the stage at all; in his case, a lapse from perfection brings its own penalty, death perhaps; his art begins when his technique is already perfect. Artists who deal in materials less fragile than human life should have no less undeviating a sense of responsibility to themselves and to art. But the performance comes afterwards, and it is the performance with which we are concerned. Of two acrobats, each equally skilful, one will be individual and an artist, the other will remain consummately skilful and uninteresting; the one having begun where

the other leaves off. Now Busoni can do, on the pianoforte, whatever he can conceive; the question is, what can he conceive? As he sat at the piano playing Chopin, I thought of Busoni, of the Bechstein piano, of what fingers can do, of many other extraneous things, never of Chopin. I saw the pianist with the Christ-like head, the carefully negligent elegance of his appearance, and I heard wonderful sounds coming out of the Bechstein piano; but, try as hard as I liked, I could not feel the contact of soul and instrument, I could not feel that a human being was expressing himself in sound. A task was magnificently accomplished, but a new beauty had not come into the world. Then the Kreutzer Sonata began, and I looked at Ysaye, as he stood, an almost shapeless mass of flesh, holding the violin between his fat fingers, and looking vaguely into the air. He put the violin to his shoulder. The face had been like a mass of clay, waiting the sculptor's thumb. As the music came, an invisible touch seemed to pass over it; the heavy mouth and chin remained firm,

pressed down on the violin; but the eyelids and the eyebrows began to move, as if the eyes saw the sound, and were drawing it in luxuriously, with a kind of sleepy ecstasy, as one draws in perfume out of a flower. Then, in that instant, a beauty which had never been in the world came into the world; a new thing was created, lived, died, having revealed itself to all those who were capable of receiving it. That thing was neither Beethoven nor Ysaye, it was made out of their meeting; it was music, not abstract, but embodied in sound; and just that miracle could never occur again, though others like it might be repeated for ever. When the sound stopped, the face returned to its blind and deaf waiting; the interval, like all the rest of life probably, not counting in the existence of that particular soul, which came and went with the music.

And Ysaye seems to me the type of the artist, not because he is faultless in technique, but because he begins to create his art at the point where faultless technique leaves off. With him, every faculty is in harmony;

he has not even too much of any good thing. There are times when Busoni astonishes one; Ysaye never astonishes one, it seems natural that he should do everything that he does, just as he does it. Art, as Aristotle has said finally, should always have "a continual slight novelty"; it should never astonish, for we are astonished only by some excess or default, never by a thing being what it ought to be. It is a fashion of the moment to prize extravagance and to be timid of perfection. That is why we give the name of artist to those who can startle us most. We have come to value technique for the violence which it gives into the hands of those who possess it, in their assault upon our nerves. We have come to look upon technique as an end in itself, rather than as a means to an end. We have but one word of praise, and we use that one word lavishly. An Ysaye and a Busoni are the same to us, and it is to our credit if we are even aware that Ysaye is the equal of Busoni.

# PACHMANN AND THE PIANO

## I

It seems to me that Pachmann is the only pianist who plays the piano as it ought to be played. I admit his limitations, I admit that he can play only certain things, but I contend that he is the greatest living pianist because he can play those things better than any other pianist can play anything. Pachmann is the Verlaine of pianists, and when I hear him I think of Verlaine reading his own verse, in a faint, reluctant voice, which you overheard. Other players have mastered the piano, Pachmann absorbs its soul, and it is only when he touches it that it really speaks its own voice.

The art of the pianist, after all, lies mainly in one thing, touch. It is by the skill, precision, and beauty of his touch that he makes music at all; it is by the quality of his touch that he evokes a more or less miraculous vision of sound for us. Touch gives him his

only means of expression; it is to him what relief is to the sculptor or what values are to the painter. To "understand," as it is called, a piece of music, is not so much as the beginning of good playing; if you do not understand it with your fingers, what shall your brain profit you? In the interpretation of music all action of the brain which does not translate itself perfectly in touch is useless. You may as well not think at all as not think in terms of your instrument, and the piano responds to one thing only, touch. Now Pachmann, beyond all other pianists, has this magic. When he plays it, the piano ceases to be a compromise. He makes it as living and penetrating as the violin, as responsive and elusive as the clavichord.

Chopin wrote for the piano with a more perfect sense of his instrument than any other composer, and Pachmann plays Chopin with an infallible sense of what Chopin meant to express in his mind. He seems to touch the notes with a kind of agony of delight; his face twitches with the actual muscular contraction of the fingers as they suspend themselves in the very act

of touch. I am told that Pachmann plays Chopin in a morbid way. Well, Chopin was morbid; there are fevers and cold sweats in his music; it is not healthy music, and it is not to be interpreted in a robust way. It must be played, as Pachmann plays it, somnambulistically, with a tremulous delicacy of intensity, as if it were a living thing on whose nerves one were operating, and as if every touch might mean life or death.

I have heard pianists who played Chopin in what they called a healthy way. The notes swung, spun, and clattered, with a heroic repercussion of sound, a hurrying reiteration of fury, signifying nothing. The piano stormed through the applause; the pianist sat imperturbably, hammering. Well, I do not think any music should be played like that, not Liszt even. Liszt connives at the suicide, but with Chopin it is a murder. When Pachmann plays Chopin the music sings itself, as if without the intervention of an executant, of one who stands between the music and our hearing. The music has to intoxicate him before he can play with it;

then he becomes its comrade, in a kind of very serious game; himself, in short, that is to say inhuman. His fingers have in them a cold magic, as of soulless elves who have sold their souls for beauty. And this beauty, which is not of the soul, is not of the flesh; it is a sea-change, the life of the foam on the edge of the depths. Or it transports him into some mid-region of the air, between hell and heaven, where he hangs listening. He listens at all his senses. The dew, as well as the raindrop, has a sound for him.

In Pachmann's playing there is a frozen tenderness, with, at moments, the elvish triumph of a gnome who has found a bright crystal or a diamond. Pachmann is inhuman, and music, too, is inhuman. To him, and rightly, it is a thing not domesticated, not familiar as a household cat with our hearth. When he plays it, music speaks no language known to us, has nothing of ourselves to tell us, but is shy, alien, and speaks a language which we do not know. It comes to us a divine hallucination, chills us a little with its "airs from heaven" or elsewhere, and breaks down for an instant

the too solid walls of the world, showing us the gulf. When d'Albert plays Chopin's Berceuse, beautifully, it is a lullaby for healthy male children growing too big for the cradle. Pachmann's is a lullably for fairy changelings who have never had a soul, but in whose veins music vibrates; and in this intimate alien thing he finds a kind of humour.

In the attempt to humanise music, that attempt which almost every executant makes, knowing that he will be judged by his success or failure in it, what is most fatally lost is that sense of mystery which, to music, is atmosphere. In this atmosphere alone music breathes tranquilly. So remote is it from us that it can only be reached through some not quite healthy nervous tension, and Pachmann's physical disquietude when he plays is but a sign of what it has cost him to venture outside humanity, into music. Yet in music this mystery is a simple thing, its native air; and the art of the musician has less difficulty in its evocation than the art of the poet or the painter. With what an effort do we persuade words or

colours back from their vulgar articulateness into at least some recollection of that mystery which is deeper than sight or speech. Music can never wholly be detached from mystery, can never wholly become articulate, and it is in our ignorance of its true nature that we would tame it to humanity and teach it to express human emotions, not its own.

Pachmann gives you pure music, not states of soul or of temperament, not interpretations, but echoes. He gives you the notes in their own atmosphere, where they live for him an individual life, which has nothing to do with emotions or ideas. Thus he does not need to translate out of two languages: first, from sound to emotion, temperament, what you will; then from that back again to sound. The notes exist; it is enough that they exist. They mean for him just the sound and nothing else. You see his fingers feeling after it, his face calling to it, his whole body imploring it. Sometimes it comes upon him in such a burst of light that he has to cry aloud, in order that he may endure the ecstasy. You see him

speaking to the music; he lifts his finger, that you may listen for it not less attentively. But it is always the thing itself that he evokes for you, as it rises flower-like out of silence, and comes to exist in the world. Every note lives, with the whole vitality of its existence. To Swinburne every word lives, just in the same way; when he says "light," he sees the sunrise; when he says "fire," he is warmed through all his blood. And so Pachmann calls up, with this ghostly magic of his, the innermost life of music. I do not think he has ever put an intention into Chopin. Chopin had no intentions. He was a man, and he suffered; and he was a musician, and he wrote music; and very likely George Sand, and Majorca, and his disease, and Scotland, and the woman who sang to him when he died, are all in the music; but that is not the question. The notes sob and shiver, stab you like a knife, caress you like the fur of a cat; and are beautiful sound, the most beautiful sound that has been called out of the piano. Pachmann calls it out for you, disinterestedly,

easily, with ecstasy, inevitably; you do not realise that he has had difficulties to conquer, that music is a thing for acrobats and athletes. He smiles to you, that you may realise how beautiful the notes are, when they trickle out of his fingers like singing water; he adores them and his own playing, as you do, and as if he had nothing to do with them but to pour them out of his hands. Pachmann is less showy with his fingers than any other pianist; his hands are stealthy acrobats, going quietly about their difficult business. They talk with the piano and the piano answers them. All that violence cannot do with the notes of the instrument, he does. His art begins where violence leaves off; that is why he can give you fortissimo without hurting the nerves of a single string; that is why he can play a run as if every note had its meaning. To the others a run is a flourish, a tassel hung on for display, a thing extra; when Pachmann plays a run you realise that it may have its own legitimate sparkle of gay life. With him every note lives, has its own body and its own soul,

and that is why it is worth hearing him play even trivial music like Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" or meaningless music like Taubert's Waltz: he creates a beauty out of sound itself and a beauty which is at the root of music. There are moments when a single chord seems to say in itself everything that music has to say. That is the moment in which everything but sound is annihilated, the moment of ecstasy; and it is of such moments that Pachmann is the poet.

And so his playing of Bach, as in the Italian Concerto in F, reveals Bach as if the dust had suddenly been brushed off his music. All that in the playing of others had seemed hard or dry becomes suddenly luminous, alive, and, above all, a miracle of sound. Through a delicacy of shading, like the art of Bach himself for purity, poignancy, and clarity, he envelops us with the thrilling atmosphere of the most absolutely musical music in the world. The playing of this concerto is the greatest thing I have ever heard Pachmann do, but when he went on to play Mozart I heard another only less beau-

tiful world of sound rise softly about me. There was the "glittering peace" undimmed, and there was the nervous spring, the diamond hardness, as well as the glowing light and ardent sweetness. Yet another manner of playing, not less appropriate to its subject, brought before me the bubbling flow, the romantic moonlight, of Weber; this music that is a little showy, a little luscious, but with a gracious feminine beauty of its own. Chopin followed, and when Pachmann plays Chopin it is as if the soul of Chopin had returned to its divine body, the notes of this sinewy and feverish music, in which beauty becomes a torture and energy pierces to the centre and becomes grace, and languor swoons and is reborn a winged energy. The great third Scherzo was played with grandeur, and it is in the Scherzos, perhaps, that Chopin has built his most enduring work. The Barcarolle, which I have heard played as if it were Niagara and not Venice, was given with perfect quietude, and the second Mazurka of Op. 50 had that

boldness of attack, with an almost stealthy intimacy in its secret rhythms, which in Pachmann's playing, and in his playing alone, gives you the dance and the reverie together. But I am not sure that the Etudes are not, in a very personal sense, what is most essential in Chopin, and I am not sure that Pachmann is not at his best in the playing of the Etudes.

Other pianists think, perhaps, but Pachmann plays. As he plays he is like one hypnotised by the music; he sees it beckoning, smiles to it, lifts his finger on a pause that you may listen to the note which is coming. This apparent hypnotism is really a fixed and continuous act of creation; there is not a note which he does not create for himself, to which he does not give his own vitality, the sensitive and yet controlling vitality of the medium. In playing the Bach he had the music before him that he might be wholly free from even the slight strain which comes from the almost unconscious act of remembering. It was for a precisely similar reason that Coleridge, in whose verse in-

spiration and art are more perfectly balanced than in any other English verse, often wrote down his poems first in prose that he might be unhampered by the conscious act of thought while listening for the music.

"There is no exquisite beauty," said Bacon in a subtle definition, "which has not some strangeness in its proportions." The playing of Pachmann escapes the insipidity of that beauty which is without strangeness; it has in it something fantastically inhuman, like fiery ice, and it is for this reason that it remains a thing uncapturable, a thing whose secret he himself could never reveal. It is like the secret of the rhythms of Verlaine, and no prosodist will ever tell us why a line like:

Dans un palais, soie et or, dans Ecbatane,

can communicate a new shiver to the most languid or the most experienced nerves. Like the art of Verlaine, the art of Pachmann is one wholly of suggestion; his fingers state nothing, they evoke. I said like the art of Verlaine, because there is a singular likeness between the two methods. But

is not all art a suggestion, an evocation, never a statement? Many of the great forces of the present day have set themselves to the task of building up a large, positive art in which everything shall be said with emphasis: the art of Zola, the art of Mr. Kipling, in literature; the art of Mr. Sargent in painting; the art of Richard Strauss in music. In all these remarkable men there is some small, essential thing lacking; and it is in men like Verlaine, like Whistler, like Pachmann, that we find the small, essential thing, and nothing else.

II

The sounds torture me: I see them in my brain;
They spin a flickering web of living threads,
Like butterflies upon the garden beds,
Nets of bright sound. I follow them: in vain.
I must not brush the least dust from their wings:
They die of a touch; but I must capture them,
Or they will turn to a caressing flame,
And lick my soul up with their flutterings.

The sounds torture me: I count them with my eyes,
I feel them like a thirst between my lips;
Is it my body or my soul that cries

With little coloured mouths of sound, and drips
In these bright drops that turn to butterflies
Dying delicately at my finger tips?

III

Pachmann has the head of a monk who has had commerce with the Devil, and it is whispered that he has sold his soul to the diabolical instrument, which, since buying it, can speak in a human voice. The sounds torture him, as a wizard is tortured by the shapes he has evoked. He makes them dance for his pleasure, and you hear their breath come and go, in the swell and subsiding of those marvellous crescendoes and diminuendoes which set the strings pulsating like a sea. He listens for the sound, listens for the last echo of it after it is gone, and is caught away from us visibly into that unholy company.

Pachmann is the greatest player of the piano now living. He cannot interpret every kind of music, though his actual power is more varied than he has led the public to suppose. I have heard him play in private

a show-piece of Liszt, a thunderous thing of immense difficulty, requiring a technique quite different from the technique which alone he cares to reveal to us; he had not played it for twenty years, and he played it with exactly the right crackling splendour that it demanded. On the rare occasions when he plays Bach, something that no one of our time has ever perceived or rendered in that composer seems to be evoked, and Bach lives again, with something of that forgotten life which only the harpsichord can help us to remember under the fingers of other players. Mozart and Weber are two of the composers whom he plays with the most natural instinct, for in both he finds and unweaves that dainty web of bright melody which Mozart made out of sunlight and Weber out of moonlight. There is nothing between him and them, as there is in Beethoven, for instance, who hides himself in the depths of a cloud, in the depths of wisdom, in the depths of the heart. And to Pachmann all this is as strange as mortal firesides to a fairy. He wanders round it,

wondering at the great walls and bars that have been set about the faint, escaping spirit of flame. There is nothing human in him, and as music turns towards humanity it slips from between his hands. What he seeks and finds in music is the inarticulate, ultimate thing in sound: the music, in fact.

It has been complained that Pachmann's readings are not intellectual, that he does not interpret. It is true that he does not interpret between the brain and music, but he is able to disimprison sound, as no one has ever done with mortal hands, and the piano, when he touches it, becomes a joyous, disembodied thing, a voice and nothing more, but a voice which is music itself. To reduce music to terms of human intelligence or even of human emotion is to lower it from its own region, where it is Ariel. There is something in music, which we can apprehend only as sound, that comes to us out of heaven or hell, mocking the human agency that gives it speech, and taking flight beyond it. When Pachmann plays a Prelude of Chopin, all that Chopin was conscious of

saying in it will, no doubt, be there; it is all there, if Godowsky plays it; every note, every shade of expression, every heightening and quickening, everything that the notes actually say. But under Pachmann's miraculous hands a miracle takes place; mystery comes about it like an atmosphere, an icy thrill traverses it, the terror and ecstasy of a beauty that is not in the world envelop it; we hear sounds that are awful and exquisite, crying outside time and space. Is it through Pachmann's nerves, or through ours, that this communion takes place? Is it technique, temperament, touch, that reveals to us what we have never dreamed was hidden in sounds? Could Pachmann himself explain to us his own magic?

He would tell us that he had practised the piano with more patience than others, that he had taken more trouble to acquire a certain touch which is really the only way to the secret of his instrument. He could tell you little more; but, if you saw his hands settle on the keys, and fly and poise there, as if they had nothing to do with the per-

turbed, listening face that smiles away from them, you would know how little he had told you. Now let us ask Godowsky, whom Pachmann himself sets above all other pianists, what he has to tell us about the way in which he plays.

When Godowsky plays he sits bent and motionless, as if picking out a pattern with his fingers. He seems to keep surreptitious watch upon them, as they run swiftly on their appointed errands. There is no errand they are not nimble enough to carry without a stumble to the journey's end. They obey him as if in fear; they dare not turn aside from the straight path; for their whole aim is to get to the end of the journey, having done their task faultlessly. Sometimes, but without relaxing his learned gravity, he plays a difficult game, as in the Paganini variations of Brahms, which were done with a skill as sure and as soulless as Paganini's may have been. Sometimes he forgets that the notes are living things, and tosses them about a little cruelly, as if they were a juggler's balls. They drop like stones; you are

sorry for them, because they are alive. How Chopin suffers, when he plays the Preludes! He plays them without a throb; the scholar has driven out the magic; Chopin becomes a mathematician. In Brahms, in the G Minor Rhapsody, you hear much more of what Brahms meant to do; for Brahms has set strange shapes dancing, like the skeletons "in the ghosts' moonshine" in a ballad of Beddoes; and these bodiless things take shape in the music, as Godowsky plays it unflinchingly, giving it to you exactly as it is, without comment. Here his fidelity to every outline of form becomes an interpretation. But Chopin is so much more than form that to follow every outline of it may be to leave Chopin out of the outline.

Pachmann, of all the interpreters of Chopin, is the most subtle, the one most likely to do for the most part what Chopin wanted. The test, I think, is in the Third Scherzo. That great composition, one of the greatest among Chopin's works, for it contains all his qualities in an intense measure, might have been thought less likely to

be done perfectly by Pachmann than such Coleridge in music, such murmurings out of paradise, as the Etude in F Minor (Op. 25, No. 2) or one of those Mazurkas in which Chopin is more poignantly fantastic in substance, more wild and whimsical in rhythm, than elsewhere in his music; and indeed, as Pachmann played them, they were strange and lovely gambols of unchristened elves. But in the Scherzo he mastered this great, violent, heroic thing as he had mastered the little freakish things and the trickling and whispering things. He gave meaning to every part of its decoration, yet lost none of the splendour and wave-like motion of the whole tossing and eager sea of sound.

Pachmann's art, like Chopin's, which it perpetuates, is of that peculiarly modern kind which aims at giving the essence of things in their fine shades: "la nuance encor!" Is there, it may be asked, any essential thing left out in the process; do we have attenuation in what is certainly a way of sharpening one's steel to a very fine point? The sharpened steel gains in what is most

vital in its purpose by this very paring away of its substance; and why should not a form of art strike deeper for the same reason? Our only answer to Whistler and Verlaine is the existence of Rodin and Wagner. There we have weight as well as sharpness; these giants fly. It was curious to hear, in the vast luminous music of the "Rheingold," flowing like water about the earth, bare to its roots, not only an amplitude but a delicacy of fine shades not less realised than in Chopin. Wagner, it is true, welds the lyric into drama, without losing its lyrical quality. Yet there is no perfect lyric which is made less by the greatness of even a perfect drama.

Chopin was once thought to be a drawing-room composer; Pachmann was once thought to be no "serious artist." Both have triumphed, not because the taste of any public has improved, but because a few people who knew have whispered the truth to one another, and at last it has leaked out like a secret.

## PADEREWSKI

I SHALL never cease to associate Paderewski with the night of the Jubilee. I had gone on foot from the Temple through those packed, gaudy, noisy, and vulgarised streets, through which no vehicles could pass, to a rare and fantastic house at the other end of London, a famous house hospitable to all the arts; and Paderewski sat with closed eyes and played the piano, there in his friend's house, as if he were in his own home. After the music was over, someone said to me, "I feel as if I had been in hell," so profound was the emotion she had experienced from the playing. I would have said heaven rather than hell, for there seemed to be nothing but pure beauty, beauty half asleep and dreaming of itself, in the marvellous playing. A spell, certainly, was over everyone, and then the exorciser became human, and jested deliciously till the early morning, when, as I

went home through the still garrulous and peopled streets, I saw the last flutter of flags and streamers between night and dawn. All the world had been rioting for pleasure in the gross way of popular demonstrations; and in the very heart of this uproar there had been, for a few people, this divine escape.

No less magical, soothing, enchanting was the apparition, in Queen's Hall, ten years later, of this unchanged creature with the tortured Burne-Jones face, level and bewildering eyes, the web of gold hair still poised like a halo. Beauty grew up around him like a sudden, exuberant growth, more vigorous and from a deeper root than before. I realised, more than ever, how the musician had always been the foundation of the virtuoso. I have used the word apparition advisedly. There is something, not only in the aspect of Paderewski, which seems to come mysteriously, but full of light, from a great distance. He startles music into a surprised awakening.

The art of Paderewski recalls to me the

art of the most skilled and the most distinguished of equilibrists, himself a Pole, Paul Cinquevalli. People often speak, wrongly, of Paderewski's skill as acrobatic. The word conveys some sense of disparagement and, so used, is inaccurate. But there is much in common between two forms of an art in which physical dexterity counts for so much, and that passionate precision to which error must be impossible. It is the same kind of joy that you get from Cinquevalli when he juggles with cannon-balls and from Paderewski when he brings a continuous thunder out of the piano. Other people do the same things, but no else can handle thunder or a cannon-ball delicately.

And Paderewski, in his absolute mastery of his instrument, seems to do the most difficult things without difficulty, with a scornful ease, an almost accidental quality which, found in perfection, marvellously decorates it. It is difficult to imagine that anyone since Liszt has had so complete a mastery of every capacity of the piano, and Liszt, though probably even more brilliant, can

hardly be imagined with this particular kind of charm. His playing is in the true sense an inspiration; he plays nothing as if he had learned it with toil, but as if it had come to him out of a kind of fiery meditation. Even his thunder is not so much a thing specially cultivated for its own sake as a single prominent detail in a vast accomplishment. When he plays, the piano seems to become thrillingly and tempestuously alive, as if brother met brother in some joyous triumph. He collaborates with it, urging it to battle like a war-horse. And the quality of the sonority which he gets out of it is unlike that which is teased or provoked from the instrument by any other player. Fierce exuberant delight wakens under his fingers, in which there is a sensitiveness almost impatient, and under his feet, which are as busy as an organist's with the pedals. The music leaps like pouring water, flood after flood of sound, caught together and flung onward by a central energy. The separate notes are never picked out and made into ornaments; all the expression goes to pas-

sage after passage, realised acutely in their sequence. Where others give you hammering on an anvil, he gives you thunder as if heard through clouds. And he is full of leisure and meditation, brooding thoughtfully over certain exquisite things as if loth to let them pass over and be gone. And he seems to play out of a dream, in which the fingers are secondary to the meaning, but report that meaning with entire felicity.

In the playing of the "Moonlight" sonata there was no Paderewski, there was nothing but Beethoven. The finale, of course, was done with the due brilliance, the executant's share in a composition not written for modern players. But what was wonderful, for its reverence, its perfection of fidelity, was the playing of the slow movement and of the little sharp movement which follows, like the crying and hopping of a bird. The ear waited, and was satisfied in every shade of anticipation; nothing was missed, nothing was added; the pianist was as it were a faithful and obedient shadow. As you listened you forgot technique, or that it was

anybody in particular who was playing: the sonata was there, with all its moonlight, as every lover of Beethoven had known that it existed.

Before the Beethoven there had been a "Variation and Fugue on an original theme," in which Paderewski played his own music, really as if he were improvising it there and then. I am not sure that that feeling is altogether to the credit of the music, which, as I heard it for the first time, seemed almost too perilously effective, in its large contrasts, its Liszt-like succession of contradictory moods. Sound was evoked that it might swell and subside like waves, break suddenly, and die out in a white rain of stinging foam. Pauses, surprises, all were delicately calculated and the weaver of these bewildered dreams seemed to watch over them like a Loge of celestial ingenuity.

When the actual Liszt came, the interminable Sonata in B minor, in which the sugar and the fire are so strangely mixed, it was as if Paderewski were still playing his own music. If ever there was a show piece

for the piano, this was it, and if ever there was a divine showman for it, it was Paderewski. You felt at once the personal sympathy of the great pianist for the great pianist. He was no longer reverential, as with Beethoven, not doing homage but taking part, sharing almost in a creation, comet-like, of stars in the sky. Nothing in the bravura disconcerted or even displeased him, no lack of coherence or obviousness in contrasts disturbed him; what was loud, boisterous, explosive, he tossed about as in a colossal game, he bathed luxuriously in what was luscious in the melodies, giving them almost more than their real worth by the delighted skill with which he set them singing. A more astonishing, a more convincing, a more overwhelming tour de force could hardly be achieved on the piano: could an eruption of Vesuvius be more spectacularly magnificent?

Liszt's music for the piano was written for a pianist who could do anything that has ever been done with the instrument, and the result is not so wholly satisfactory as in the

case of Chopin, who, with a smaller technique, knew more of the secret of music. Chopin never dazzles, Liszt blinds. It is a question if he ever did full justice to his own genius, which was partly that of an innovator, and people are only now beginning to do justice to what was original as well as fine in his work. How many ideas Wagner caught from him, in his shameless transfiguring triumphant way! The melody of the Flower-Maidens, for instance, in "Parsifal," is borrowed frankly from a tone-poem of Liszt in which it is no more than a thin, rocking melody, without any of the mysterious fascination that Wagner put into it. But in writing for the piano Liszt certainly remembered that it was he, and not some unknown person, who was to play these hard and showy rhapsodies, in which there are no depths, though there are splendours. That is why Liszt is the test rather of the virtuoso than of the interpreter, why, therefore, it was so infinitely more important that Paderewski should have played the Beethoven sonata as imper-

sonally as he did than that he should have played the Liszt sonata with so much personal abandonment. Between those limits there seems to be contained the whole art of the pianist, and Paderewski has attained both limits.

After his concert was over, Paderewski gave seven encores, in the midst of an enthusiasm which recurs whenever and wherever he gives a concert. What is the peculiar quality in this artist which acts always with the same intoxicating effect? Is it anything quite normal in his fingers, or is it, in the image of a brilliant and fantastic writer on music in America, Mr. James Huneker, a soul like the soul of Belus, "the Raphael of the piano," which, "suspended above him, like a "coat of many colors," mesmerises the audience, while he sits motionless, not touching the notes?

Is Paderewski after all a Belus? Is it his many coloured soul that "magnetises our poor vertebræ," in Verlaine's phrase, and not the mere skill of his fingers? Art, it has been said, is contagious, and to compel

universal sympathy is to succeed in the last requirements of an art. Of what difference is it whether, like Keats, he perpetuates his personal magnetism in a stanza, or, like Paderewski, sheds it, like a perfume, for that passing moment which is all the eternity ever given to the creator of beautiful sounds?

## A REFLECTION AT A DOLMETSCH CONCERT

THE interpreter of ancient music, Arnold Dolmetsch, is one of those rare magicians who are able to make roses blossom in midwinter. While music has been modernising itself until the piano becomes an orchestra, and Berlioz requires four orchestras to obtain a pianissimo, this strange man of genius has quietly gone back a few centuries and discovered for himself an exquisite lost world, which was disappearing like a fresco peeling off a wall. He has burrowed in libraries and found unknown manuscripts like a savant, he has worked at misunderstood notations and found out a way of reading them like a cryptogrammatist, he has first found out how to restore and then how to make over again harpsichord, and virginals, and clavichord, and all those instruments which had become silent curiosities in museums.

It is only beginning to be realised, even by musical people, that the clavecin music of, for instance, Bach, loses at least half its charm, almost its identity, when played on the modern grand piano; that the exquisite music of Rameau and Couperin, the brilliant and beautiful music of Scarlatti, is almost inaudible on everything but the harpsichord and the viols; and that there exists, far earlier than these writers, a mass of English and Italian music of extreme beauty, which has never been spoiled on the piano because it has never been played on it. To any one who has once touched a spinet, harpsichord, or clavichord, the piano must always remain a somewhat inadequate instrument; lacking in the precision, the penetrating charm, the infinite definite reasons for existence of those instruments of wires and jacks and quills which its metallic rumble has been supposed so entirely to have superseded. As for the clavichord, to have once touched it, feeling the softness with which one's fingers make their own music, like wind among the reeds, is to have lost

something of one's relish even for the music of the violin, which is also a windy music, but the music of wind blowing sharply among the trees. It is on such instruments that Mr. Dolmetsch plays to us; and he plays to us also on the lute, the theorbo, the viola da gamba, the viola d' amore, and I know not how many varieties of those stringed instruments which are most familiar to most of us from the early Italian pictures in which whimsical little angels with crossed legs hold them to their chins.

Mr. Dolmetsch is, I suppose, the only living man who can read lute-music and play on the lute, an instrument of extraordinary beauty, which was once as common in England as the guitar still is in Spain. And, having made with his own hands the materials of the music which he has recovered from oblivion, he has taught himself and he has taught others to play this music on these instruments and to sing it to their accompaniment. In a music room, which is really the living room of a house, with viols hanging on the walls, a chamber-organ in

one corner, a harpsichord in another, a clavichord laid across the arms of a chair, this music seems to carry one out of the world, and shut one in upon a house of dreams, full of intimate and ghostly voices. It is a house of peace, where music is still that refreshment which it was before it took fever, and became accomplice and not minister to the nerves, and brought the clamour of the world into its seclusion.

Go from a concert at Dolmetsch's to a Tschaikowsky concert at the Queen's Hall. Tschaikowsky is a debauch, not so much passionate as feverish. The rushing of his violins, like the rushing of an army of large winged birds; the thud, snap, and tingle of his strange orchestra; the riotous image of Russian peasants leaping and hopping in their country dances, which his dance measures call up before one; those sweet solid harmonies in which (if I may quote the voluptuous phrase of a woman) one sets one's teeth as into nougat; all this is like a very material kind of pleasure, in which the senses for a moment forget the soul. For a moment

only, for is it not the soul, a kind of discontented crying out against pleasure and pain, which comes back distressingly into this after all pathetic music? All modern music is pathetic; discontent (so much idealism as that!) has come into all modern music, that it may be sharpened and disturbed enough to fix our attention. And Tschaikowsky speaks straight to the nerves, with that touch of unmanliness which is another characteristic of modern art. There is a vehement and mighty sorrow in the Passion Music of Bach, by the side of which the grief of Tschaikowsky is like the whimpering of a child. He is unconscious of reticence, unconscious of self-control. He is unhappy, and he weeps floods of tears, beats his breast, curses the daylight; he sees only the misery of the moment, and he sees the misery of the moment as a thing endless and overwhelming. The child who has broken his toy can realise nothing in the future but a passionate regret for the toy.

In Tschaikowsky there is none of the quieting of thought. The only healing for

our nerves lies in abstract thought, and he can never get far enough from his nerves to look calmly at his own discontent. All those wild, broken rhythms, rushing this way and that, are letting out his secret all the time: "I am unhappy, and I know not why I am unhappy; I want, but I know not what I want." In the most passionate and the most questioning music of Wagner there is always air; Tschaikowsky is suffocating. It is himself that he pities so much, and not himself because he shares in the general sorrow of the world. To Tristan and Isolde the whole universe is an exultant and martyred sharer in their love; they know only the absolute. Even suffering does not bring nobility to Tschaikowsky.

To pass from Wagner to Tschaikowsky, from "Parsifal" to the Pathetic Symphony, is like passing from a church in which priests are offering mass to a hut in which peasants are quarrelling, dancing, and making love. Tschaikowsky has both force and sincerity, but it is the force and sincerity of a ferocious child. He takes the orchestra

in both hands, tears it to pieces, catches up a fragment of it here, a fragment of it there, masters it like an enemy; he makes it do what he wants. But he uses his fist where Wagner touches with the tips of his fingers; he shows ill-breeding after the manners of the supreme gentleman. Wagner can use the whole strength of the orchestra, and not make a noise: he never ends on a bang. But Tschaikowsky loves noise for its own sake; he likes to pound the drum, and to hear the violins running up and down scales like acrobats. Wagner takes his rhythms from the sea, as in "Tristan," from fire, as in parts of the "Ring," from light, as in "Parsifal." But Tschaikowsky deforms the rhythms of nature with the caprices of half-civilised impulses. He puts the frog-like dancing of the Russian peasant into his tunes; he cries and roars like a child in a rage. He gives himself to you just as he is; he is immensely conscious of himself and of his need to take you into his confidence. In your delight at finding any one so alive, you are inclined to welcome him without re-

serve, and to forget that a man of genius is not necessarily a great artist, and that, if he is not a great artist, he is not a satisfactory man of genius.

I contrast him with Wagner because it seems to me that Wagner, alone among quite modern musicians, and though indeed he appeals to our nerves more forcibly than any of them, has that breadth and universality by which emotion ceases to be merely personal and becomes elemental. To the musicians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, music was an art which had to be carefully guarded from the too disturbing presence of emotion; emotion is there always, whenever the music is fine music; but the music is something much more than a means for the expression of emotion. It is a pattern, its beauty lies in its obedience to a law, it is music made for music's sake, with what might be called a more exclusive devotion to art than that of our modern musician. This music aims at the creation of beauty in sound; it conceives of beautiful sound as a thing which cannot exist

outside order and measure; it has not yet come to look upon transgression as an essential part of liberty. It does not even desire liberty, but is content with loving obedience. It can express emotion, but it will never express an emotion carried to that excess at which the modern idea of emotion begins. Thus, for all its suggestions of pain, grief, melancholy, it will remain, for us at least, happy music, voices of a house of peace. Is there, in the future of music, after it has expressed for us all our emotions, and we are tired of our emotions, and weary enough to be content with a little rest, any likelihood of a return to this happy music, into which beauty shall come without the selfishness of desire?

## THE DRAMATISATION OF SONG

All art is a compromise, in which the choice of what is to be foregone must be left somewhat to the discretion of nature. When the sculptor foregoes colour, when the painter foregoes relief, when the poet foregoes the music which soars beyond words and the musician that precise meaning which lies in words alone, he follows a kind of necessity in things, and the compromise seems to be ready-made for him. But there will always be those who are discontented with no matter what fixed limits, who dream, like Wagner, of a possible, or, like Mallarmé, of an impossible, fusion of the arts. These would invent for themselves a compromise which has not yet come into the world, a gain without loss, a re-adjustment in which the scales shall bear so much additional weight without trembling. But nature is not always obedient to this too autocratic command.

Take the art of the voice. In its essence, the art of the voice is the same in the nightingale and in Melba. The same note is produced in the same way; the expression given to that note, the syllable which that note renders, are quite different things. Song does not in itself require words in order to realise even the utmost of its capacities. The voice is an instrument like the violin, and no more in need of words for its expression than the violin. Perhaps the ideal of singing would be attained when a marvellous voice, which had absorbed into itself all that temperament and training had to give it, sang inarticulate music, like a violin which could play itself. There is nothing which such an instrument could not express, nothing which exists as pure music; and, in this way, we should have the art of the voice, with the least possible compromise.

The compromise is already far on its way when words begin to come into the song. Here are two arts helping one another; something is gained, but how much is lost? Undoubtedly the words lose, and does not

the voice lose something also, in its directness of appeal? Add acting to voice and words, and you get the ultimate compromise, opera, in which other arts as well have their share and in which Wagner would have us see the supreme form of art. Again something is lost; we lose more and more, perhaps for a greater gain. Tristan sings lying on his back, in order to represent a sick man; the actual notes which he sings are written partly in order to indicate the voice of a sick man. For the sake of what we gain in dramatic and even theatrical expressiveness, we have lost a two-fold means of producing vocal beauty. Let us rejoice in the gain, by all means; but not without some consciousness of the loss, not with too ready a belief that the final solution of the problem has been found.

An attempt at some solution is, at this moment, being made in Paris by a singer who is not content to be Carmen or Charlotte Corday, but who wants to invent a method of her own for singing and acting at the same time, not as a character in an

opera, but as a private interpreter between poetry and the world.

Imagine a woman who suggests at the same time Sarah Bernhardt and Mrs. Brown-Potter, without being really like either; she is small, exuberantly blonde, her head is surrounded by masses of loosely twisted blonde hair; she has large grey eyes, that can be grave, or mocking, or passionate, or cruel, or watchful; a large nose, an intent, eloquent mouth. She wears a trailing dress that follows the lines of the figure vaguely, supple to every movement. When she sings, she has an old, high-backed chair in which she can sit, or on which she can lean. When I heard her, there was a mirror on the other side of the room, opposite to her; she saw no one else in the room, once she had surrendered herself to the possession of the song, but she was always conscious of that image of herself which came back to her out of the mirror: it was herself watching herself, in a kind of delight at the beauty which she was evoking out of words, notes, and expressive movement.

Her voice is strong and rich, imperfectly trained, but the voice of a born singer; her acting is even more the acting of a born actress; but it is the temperament of the woman that flames into her voice and gestures, and sets her whole being violently and delicately before you. She makes a drama of each song, and she re-creates that drama over again, in her rendering of the intentions of the words and of the music. It is as much with her eyes and her hands, as with her voice, that she evokes the melody of a picture; it is a picture that sings, and that sings in all its lines. There is something in her aspect, what shall I call it? tenacious; it is a woman who is an artist because she is a woman, who takes in energy at all her senses and gives out energy at all her senses. She sang some tragic songs of Schumann, some mysterious songs of Maeterlinck, some delicate love-songs of Charles van Lerberghe. As one looked and listened it was impossible to think more of the words than of the music or of the music than of the words. One took them simultaneously,

as one feels at once the softness and the perfume of a flower. I understood why Mallarmé had seemed to see in her the realisation of one of his dreams. Here was a new art, made up of a new mixing of the arts, in one subtly intoxicating elixir. To Mallarmé it was the more exquisite because there was in it none of the broad general appeal of opera, of the gross recognised proportions of things.

This dramatisation of song, done by any one less subtly, less completely, and less sincerely an artist, would lead us, I am afraid, into something more disastrous than even the official concert, with its rigid persons in evening dress holding sheets of music in their tremulous hands, and singing the notes set down for them to the best of their vocal ability. Madame Georgette Leblanc is an exceptional artist, and she has made an art after her own likeness, which exists because it is the expression of herself, of a strong nature always in vibration. What she feels as a woman she can render as an artist; she is at once instinctive and deliberate, delib-

erate because it is her natural instinct, the natural instinct of a woman who is essentially a woman, to be so. I imagine her always singing in front of a mirror, always recognising her own shadow there, and the more absolutely abandoned to what the song is saying through her because of that uninterrupted communion with herself.

## THE MEININGEN ORCHESTRA

Other orchestras give performances, readings, approximations; the Meiningen orchestra gives an interpretation, that is, the thing itself. When this orchestra plays a piece of music every note lives, and not, as with most orchestras, every particularly significant note. Brahms is sometimes dull, but he is never dull when these people play him; Schubert is sometimes tame, but not when they play him. What they do is precisely to put vitality into even those parts of a composition in which it is scarcely present, or scarcely realisable; and that is a much more difficult thing, and really a more important thing, for the proper appreciation of music, than the heightening of what is already fine, and obviously fine in itself. And this particular quality of interpretation has its value too as criticism. For, while it gives the utmost value to what is implicitly there, there at least in embryo, it cannot create out of

nothing; it cannot make insincere work sincere, or fill empty work with meaning which never could have belonged to it. Brahms, at his moments of least vitality, comes into a new vigour of life; but Strauss, played by these sincere, precise, thoughtful musicians shows, as he never could show otherwise, the distance at which his lively spectre stands from life. When I heard the "Don Juan," which I had heard twice before, and liked less the second time than the first, I realised finally the whole strain, pretence, and emptiness of the thing. Played with this earnest attention to the meaning of every note, it was like a trivial drama when Duse acts it; it went to pieces through being taken at its own word. It was as if a threadbare piece of stuff were held up to the full sunlight; you saw every stitch that was wanting.

The "Don Juan" was followed by the Entr'acte and Ballet music from "Rosamunde," and here the same sunlight was no longer criticism, but rather an illumination. I have never heard any music more beautifully played. I could only think of the

piano playing of Pachmann. The faint, delicate music just came into existence, breathed a little, and was gone. Here for once was an orchestra which could literally be overheard. The overture to the "Meistersinger" followed, and here, for the first time, I got, quite flawless and uncontradictory, the two impressions which that piece presents to one simultaneously. I heard the unimpeded march forward, and I distinguished at the same time every delicate impediment thronging the way. Some renderings give you a sense of solidity and straightforward movement; others of the elaborate and various life which informs this so solid structure. Here one got the complete thing, completely rendered.

I could not say the same of the rendering of the overture to "Tristan." Here the notes, all that was so to speak merely musical in the music, were given their just expression; but the something more, the vast heave and throb of the music, was not there. It was "classical" rendering of what is certainly not "classical" music. Hear that

overture as Richter gives it, and you will realise just where the Meiningen orchestra is lacking. It has the kind of energy which is required to render Beethoven's multitudinous energy, or the energy which can be heavy and cloudy in Brahms, or like overpowering light in Bach, or, in Wagner himself, an energy which works within known limits, as in the overture to the "Meistersinger." But that wholly new, and somewhat feverish, overwhelming quality which we find in the music of "Tristan" meets with something less than the due response. It is a quality which people used to say was not musical at all, a quality which does not appeal certainly to the musical sense alone: for the rendering of that we must go to Richter.

Otherwise, in that third concert it would be difficult to say whether Schumann, Brahms, Mozart, or Beethoven was the better rendered. Perhaps one might choose Mozart for pure pleasure. It was the "Serenade" for wind instruments, and it seemed, played thus perfectly, the most delightful music in the world. The music of Mozart is, no

doubt, the most beautiful music in the world. When I heard the serenade I thought of Coventry Patmore's epithet, actually used, I think, about Mozart: "glittering peace." Schumann, Brahms, Wagner, and Beethoven all seemed for the moment to lose a little of their light under this pure and tranquil and unwavering "glitter." I hope I shall never hear the "Serenade" again, for I shall never hear it played as these particular players played it.

The Meiningen orchestra is famous for its wind, and when, at the first concert, I heard Beethoven's Rondino for wind instruments, it seemed to me that I was hearing brass for the first time as I had imagined brass ought to sound. Here was, not so much a new thing which one had never thought possible, as that precise thing which one's ears had expected, and waited for, and never heard. One quite miraculous thing these wind players certainly did, in common, however, with the whole orchestra. And that was to give an effect of distance, as if the sound came actually from beyond

the walls. I noticed it first in the overture to "Leonore," the first piece which they played; an unparalleled effect and one of surprising beauty.

Another matter for which the Meiningen orchestra is famous is its interpretation of the works of Brahms. At each concert some fine music of Brahms was given finely, but it was not until the fourth concert that I realised, on hearing the third Symphony, everything of which Brahms was capable. It may be that a more profound acquaintance with his music would lead me to add other things to this thing as the finest music which he ever wrote; but the third Symphony certainly revealed to me, not altogether a new, but a complete Brahms. It had all his intellect and something more; thought had taken fire, and become a kind of passion.

## MOZART IN THE MIRABELL-GARTEN

They are giving a cycle of Mozart operas at Munich, at the Hof-Theater, to follow the Wagner operas at the Prinz-Regenten-Theatre; and I stayed, on my way to Salzburg, to hear "Die Zauberflöte." It was perfectly given, with a small, choice orchestra under Herr Zumpe, and with every part except the tenor's admirably sung and acted. Herr Julius Zarest, from Hanover, was particularly good as Papageno; the Eva of "Die Meistersinger" made an equally good Pamina. And it was staged under Herr von Possart's direction, as suitably and as successfully, in its different way, as the Wagner opera had been. The sombre Egyptian scenes of this odd story, with its menagerie and its pantomime transformation, were turned into a thrilling spectacle, and by means of nothing but a little canvas and paint and limelight. It could have

cost very little, compared with an English Shakespeare revival, let us say; but how infinitely more spectacular, in the good sense, it was! Every effect was significant, perfectly in its place, doing just what it had to do, and without thrusting itself forward for separate admiration. German art of to-day is all decorative, and it is at its best when it is applied to the scenery of the stage. Its fault, in serious painting, is that it is too theatrical, it is too anxious to be full of too many qualities besides the qualities of good painting. It is too emphatic, it is meant for artificial light. If Franz Stuck would paint for the stage, instead of using his vigorous brush to paint nature without distinction and nightmares without imagination on easel-canvases, he would do, perhaps rather better, just what these scene-painters do, with so much skill and taste. They have the sense of effective decoration; and German art, at present, is almost wholly limited to that sense.

I listened, with the full consent of my eyes, to the lovely music, which played round

the story like light transfiguring a masquerade; and now, by a lucky chance, I can brood over it here in Salzburg, where Mozart was born, where he lived, where the house in which he wrote the opera is to be seen, a little garden-house brought over from Vienna and set down where it should always have been, high up among the pine-woods of the Capuzinerberg. I find myself wondering how much Mozart took to himself, how much went to his making, in this exquisite place, set in a hollow of great hills, from which, if you look down upon it, it has the air of a little toy town out of a Noah's Ark, set square in a clean, trim, perfectly flat map of meadows, with its flat roofs, packed close together on each side of a long, winding river, which trails across the whole breadth of the plain. From the midst of the town you look up everywhere at heights; rocks covered with pine-trees, beyond them hills hooded with white clouds, great soft walls of darkness, on which the mist is like the bloom of a plum; and, right above you, the castle, on its steep rock swathed in trees,

with its grey walls and turrets, like the castle which one has imagined for all the knights of all the romances. All this, no doubt, entered into the soul of Mozart, and had its meaning for him; but where I seem actually to see him, where I can fancy him walking most often, and hearing more sounds than elsewhere come to him through his eyes and his senses, is the Mirabell-Garten, which lies behind the palace built by an Archbishop of Salzburg in the seventeenth century, and which is laid out in the conventional French fashion, with a harmony that I find in few other gardens. I have never walked in a garden which seemed to keep itself so reticently within its own severe and gracious limits. The trees themselves seem to grow naturally into the pattern of this garden, with its formal alleys, in which the birds fly in and out of the trellised roofs, its square-cut bushes, its low stone balustrades, its tall urns out of which droop trails of pink and green, its round flower-beds, each of a single colour, set at regular intervals on the grass, its tiny foun-

tain dripping faintly into a green and brown pool; the long, sad lines of the Archbishop's Palace, off which the brown paint is peeling; the whole sad charm, dainty melancholy, formal beauty, and autumnal air of it. It was in the Mirabell-Garten that I seemed nearest to Mozart.

The music of Mozart, as one hears it in "Die Zauberflöte," is music without desire, music content with beauty, and to be itself. It has the firm outlines of Dürer or of Botticelli, with the same constraint within a fixed form, if one compares it with the Titian-like freedom and splendour of Wagner. In hearing Mozart I saw Botticelli's "Spring"; in hearing Wagner I had seen the Titian "Scourging of Christ." Mozart has what Coventry Patmore called "a glittering peace": to Patmore that quality distinguished supreme art, and, indeed, the art of Mozart is, in its kind, supreme. It has an adorable purity of form, and it has no need to look outside those limits which it has found or fixed for itself. Mozart

cares little, as a rule, for what he has to express; but he cares infinitely for the way in which he expresses everything, and, through the mere emotional power of the notes themselves, he conveys to us all that he cares to convey: awe, for instance, in those solemn scenes of the priests of Isis. He is a magician, who plays with his magic, and can be gay, out of mere pleasant idleness, fooling with Papagenus as Shakespeare fools in "Twelfth-Night." "Die Zauberflöte" is really a very fine kind of pantomime, to which music lends itself in the spirit of the thing, yet without condescending to be grotesque. The duet of Papagenus and Papagena is absolutely comic, but it is as lovely as a duet of two birds, of less flaming feather. As the lovers ascend through fires and floods, only the piping of the magic flute is heard in the orchestra: imagine Wagner threading it into the web of a great orchestral pattern! For Mozart it was enough, and for his art, it was enough. He gives you harmony which does not need to mean

anything outside itself, in order to be supremely beautiful; and he gives you beauty with a certain exquisite formality, not caring to go beyond the lines which contain that reticent, sufficient charm of the Mirabell-Garten.

# NOTES ON WAGNER AT BAYREUTH

## I. BAYREUTH AND MUNICH

BAYREUTH is Wagner's creation in the world of action, as the music-dramas are his creation in the world of art; and it is a triumph not less decisive, in its transposition of dream into reality. Remember that every artist, in every art, has desired his own Bayreuth, and that only Wagner has attained it. Who would not rather remain at home, receiving the world, than go knocking, humbly or arrogantly, at many doors, offering an entertainment, perhaps unwelcome? The artist must always be at cautious enmity with his public, always somewhat at its mercy, even after he has conquered its attention. The crowd never really loves art, it resents art as a departure from its level of mediocrity; and fame comes to an artist only when there is a suf-

ficient number of intelligent individuals in the crowd to force their opinion upon the resisting mass of the others, in the form of a fashion which it is supposed to be unintelligent not to adopt. Bayreuth exists because Wagner willed that it should exist, and because he succeeded in forcing his ideas upon a larger number of people of power and action than any other artist of our time. Wagner always got what he wanted, not always when he wanted it. He had a king on his side, he had Liszt on his side, the one musician of all others who could do most for him; he had the necessary enemies, besides the general resistance of the crowd; and at last he got his theatre, not in time to see the full extent of his own triumph in it, but enough, I think, to let him die perfectly satisfied. He had done what he wanted: there was the theatre, and there were his works, and the world had learnt where to come when it was called.

And there is now a new Bayreuth, where, almost as well as at Bayreuth itself, one can see and hear Wagner's music as Wagner

wished it to be seen and heard. The square, plain, grey and green Prinz-Regenten Theatre at Munich is an improved copy of the theatre at Bayreuth, with exactly the same ampitheatrical arrangement of seats, the same invisible orchestra and vast stage. Everything is done as at Bayreuth: there are even the three "fanfaren" at the doors, with the same punctual and irrevocable closing of the doors at the beginning of each act. As at Bayreuth, the solemnity of the whole thing makes one almost nervous, for the first few minutes of each act; but, after that, how near one is, in this perfectly darkened, perfectly quiet theatre, in which the music surges up out of the "mystic gulf," and the picture exists in all the ecstasy of a picture on the other side of it, beyond reality, how near one is to being alone, in the passive state in which the flesh is able to endure the great burdening and uplifting of vision. There are thus now two theatres in the world in which music and drama can be absorbed, and not merely guessed at.

## II. THE LESSON OF PARSIFAL

The performance of "Parsifal," as I saw it at Bayreuth, seemed to me the most really satisfying performance I had ever seen in a theatre; and I have often, since then, tried to realise for myself exactly what it was that one might learn from that incarnation of the ideas, the theoretical ideas, of Wagner. The music itself has the abstract quality of Coventry Patmore's odes. I cannot think of it except in terms of sight. Light surges up out of it, as out of unformed depths; light descends from it, as from the sky; it breaks into flashes and sparkles of light, it broadens out into a vast sea of light. It is almost metaphysical music; pure ideas take visible form, humanise themselves in a new kind of ecstasy. The ecstasy has still a certain fever in it; these shafts of light sometimes pierce the soul like a sword; it is not peace, the peace of Bach, to whom music can give all he wants; it is the unsatisfied desire of a kind of flesh of the spirit, and music is but a voice. "Parsifal" is religious music, but it is the music of a religion which had never

before found expression. I have found in a motet of Vittoria one of the motives of "Parsifal," almost note for note, and there is no doubt that Wagner owed much to Palestrina and his school. But even the sombre music of Vittoria does not plead and implore like Wagner's. The outcry comes and goes, not only with the suffering of Amfortas, the despair of Kundry. This abstract music has human blood in it.

What Wagner has tried to do is to unite mysticism and the senses, to render mysticism through the senses. Mr. Watts-Dunton has pointed out that that is what Rossetti tried to do in painting. That mysterious intensity of expression which we see in the faces of Rossetti's latest pictures has something of the same appeal as the insatiable crying-out of a carnal voice, somewhere in the depths of Wagner's latest music.

In "Parsifal," more perhaps than anywhere else in his work, Wagner realised the supreme importance of monotony, the effect that could be gained by the incessant

repetition of a few ideas. All that music of the closing scene of the first act is made out of two or three phrases, and it is by the finest kind of invention that those two or three phrases are developed, and repeated, and woven together into so splendid a tissue. And, in the phrases themselves, what severity, what bareness almost! It is in their return upon themselves, their weighty reiterance, that their force and significance become revealed; and if, as Nietzsche says, they end by hypnotising us, well, all art is a kind of hypnotic process, a cunning absorption of the will of another.

"Parsifal" presents itself as before all things a picture. The music, soaring up from hidden depths, and seeming to drop from the heights, and be reflected back from shining distances, though it is, more than anything I have ever heard, like one of the great forces of nature, the sea or the wind, itself makes pictures, abstract pictures; but even the music, as one watches the stage, seems to subordinate itself to the visible picture there. And, so perfectly do all the

arts flow into one, the picture impresses one chiefly by its rhythm, the harmonies of its convention. The lesson of "Parsifal" is the lesson that, in art, rhythm is everything. Every moment in the acting of this drama makes a picture, and every movement is slow, deliberate, as if automatic. No actor makes a gesture, which has not been regulated for him; there is none of that unintelligent haphazard known as being "natural"; these people move like music, or with that sense of motion which it is the business of painting to arrest. Gesture being a part of a picture, how should it but be settled as definitely, for that pictorial effect which all action on the stage is (more or less unconsciously) striving after, as if it were the time of a song, or the stage direction: "Cross stage to right"? Also, every gesture is slow; even despair having its artistic limits, its reticence. It is difficult to express the delight with which one sees, for the first time, people really motionless on the stage. After all, action, as it has been said, is only a way of spoiling something. The aim of

the modern stage, of all drama, since the drama of the Greeks, is to give a vast impression of bustle, of people who, like most people in real life, are in a hurry about things; and our actors, when they are not making irrelevant speeches, are engaged in frantically trying to make us see that they are feeling acute emotion, by I know not what restlessness, contortion, and ineffectual excitement. If it were once realised how infinitely more important are the lines in the picture than these staccato extravagances which do but aim at tearing it out of its frame, breaking violently through it, we should have learnt a little, at least, of what the art of the stage should be, of what Wagner has shown us that it can be.

Distance from the accidents of real life, atmosphere, the space for a new, fairer world to form itself, being of the essence of Wagner's representation, it is worth noticing how adroitly he throws back this world of his, farther and farther into the background, by a thousand tricks of lighting, the actual distance of the stage from the

proscenium, and by such calculated effects, as that long scene of the Graal, with its prolonged movement and ritual, through the whole of which Parsifal stands motionless, watching it all. How that solitary figure at the side, merely looking on, though, unknown to himself, he is the centre of the action, also gives one the sense of remoteness, which it was Wagner's desire to produce, throwing back the action into a reflected distance, as we watch someone on the stage who is watching it!

The beauty of this particular kind of acting and staging is of course the beauty of convention. The scenery, for instance, with what an enchanting leisure it merely walks along before one's eyes, when a change is wanted! Convention, here as in all plastic art, is founded on natural truth very closely studied. The rose is first learned, in every wrinkle of its petals, petal by petal, before that reality is elaborately departed from, in order that a new, abstract beauty may be formed out of those outlines, all but those outlines being left out.

And "Parsifal," which is thus solemnly represented before us, has in it, in its very essence, that hieratic character which it is the effort of supreme art to attain. At times one is reminded of the most beautiful drama in the world, the Indian drama "Sakuntala": in that litter of leaves, brought in so touchingly for the swan's burial, in the old hermit watering his flowers. There is something of the same universal tenderness, the same religious linking together of all the world, in some vague enough, but very beautiful, Pantheism. I think it is beside the question to discuss how far Wagner's intentions were technically religious: how far Parsifal himself is either Christ or Buddha, and how far Kundry is a new Magdalen. Wagner's mind was the mind to which all legend is sacred, every symbol of divine things to be held in reverence; but symbol, with him, was after all a means to an end, and could never have been accepted as really an end in itself. I should say that in "Parsifal" he is profoundly religious, but not because he intended, or did

not intend, to shadow the Christian mysteries. His music, his acting, are devout, because the music has a disembodied ecstasy, and the acting a noble rhythm, which can but produce in us something of the solemnity of sensation produced by the service of the Mass, and are in themselves a kind of religious ceremonial.

### III. THE ART OF WAGNER

In saying, as we may truly say, that Wagner made music pictorial, it should be remembered that there is nothing new in the aim, only in the continuity of its success. Haydn, in his "Creation," evoked landscapes, giving them precision by an almost mechanical imitation of cuckoo and nightingale. Trees had rustled and water flowed in the music of every composer. But with Wagner it may be said that the landscape of his music moves before our eyes as clearly as the moving scenery with which he does but accentuate it; and it is always there, not a décor, but a world, the natural world in the midst of which his people of the

drama live their passionate life, and a world in sympathy with all their passion. And in his audible representation of natural sounds and natural sights he does, consummately, what others have only tried, more or less well, to do. When, in the past at least, the critics objected to the realism of his imitative effects, they forgot that all other composers, at one time or another, had tried to be just as imitative, but had not succeeded so well in their imitations. Wagner, in his painting, is the Turner of music. He brings us nature, heroically exalted, full of fiery splendour, but nature as if caught in a mirror, not arranged, subdued, composed, for the frame of a picture. He is afraid of no realism, however mean, because he has confidence in nature as it is, apprehended with all the clairvoyance of emotion.

Between the abyss of the music, out of which the world rises up with all its voices, and the rocks and clouds, in which the scenery carries us onward to the last horizon of the world, gods and men act out the brief human tragedy, as if on a narrow island in

the midst of a great sea. A few steps this way or that will plunge them into darkness; the darkness awaits them, however they succeed or fail, whether they live nobly or ignobly, in the interval; but the interval absorbs them, as if it were to be eternity, and we see them rejoicing and suffering with an abandonment to the moment which intensifies the pathos of what we know is futile. Love, in Wagner, is so ecstatic and so terrible, because it must compass all its anguish and delight into an immortal moment, before which there is only a great darkness, and only a great darkness afterwards. Sorrow is so lofty and so consoling because it is no less conscious of its passing hour.

And meanwhile action is not everything, as it is for other makers of drama; is but one among many modes of the expression of life. Those long narratives, which some find so tedious, so undramatic, are part of Wagner's protest against the frequently false emphasis of action. In Wagner anticipation and memory are seen to be often equally intense with the instant of realisa-

tion. Siegfried is living with at least as powerful and significant a life when he lies under the trees listening to the song of the birds as when he is killing the dragon. And it is for this that the "motives," which are after all only the materialising of memory, were created by Wagner. These motives, by which the true action of the drama expresses itself, are a symbol of the inner life, of its preponderance over outward event, and, in their guidance of the music, their indication of the real current of interest, have a spiritualising effect upon both music and action, instead of, as was once thought, materialising both.

Wagner's aim at expressing the soul of things is still further helped by his system of continuous, unresolved melody. The melody which circumscribes itself like Giotto's O is almost as tangible a thing as a statue; it has almost contour. But this melody afloat in the air, flying like a bird, without alighting for more than a moment's swaying poise, as the notes flit from strings to voice, and from voice to wood and wind,

is more than a mere heightening of speech: it partakes of the nature of thought, but it is more than thought; it is the whole expression of the subconscious life, saying more of himself than any person of the drama has ever found in his own soul.

It is here that Wagner unites with the greatest dramatists, and distinguishes himself from the contemporary heresy of Ibsen, whose only too probable people speak a language exactly on the level of their desks and their shop-counters. Except in the "Meistersinger," all Wagner's personages are heroic, and for the most part those supreme sublimations of humanity, the people of legend, Tannhäuser, Tristan, Siegfried, Parsifal, have at once all that is in humanity and more than is in humanity. Their place in a national legend permits them, without disturbing our critical sense of the probability of things, a superhuman passion; for they are ideals, this of chivalry, that of love, this of the bravery, that of the purity, of youth. Yet Wagner employs infinite devices to give them more and more of veri-

similitude; modulating song, for instance, into a kind of chant which we can almost take for actual speech. It is thus the more interesting to note the point to which realism conducts him, the limit at which it stops, his conception of a spiritual reality which begins where realism leaves off.

And, in his treatment of scenery also, we have to observe the admirable dexterity of his compromises. The supernatural is accepted frankly with almost the childish popular belief in a dragon rolling a loathly bulk painfully, and breathing smoke. But note that the dragon, when it is thrown back into the pit, falls without sound; note that the combats are without the ghastly and foolish modern tricks of blood and disfigurement; note how the crowds pose as in a good picture, with slow gestures, and without intrusive individual pantomime. As I have said in speaking of "Parsifal," there is one rhythm throughout; music, action, speech, all obey it. When Brünnhilde awakens after her long sleep, the music is an immense thanksgiving for light, and all her

being finds expression in a great embracing movement towards the delight of day. Siegfried stands silent for I know not what space of time; and it is in silence always, with a wave-like or flame-like music surging about them, crying out of the depths for them, that all the lovers in Wagner love at first sight. Tristan, when he has drunk the potion; Siegmund, when Sieglinde gives him to drink; Siegfried, when Brünnhilde awakens to the world and to him: it is always in the silence of rapture that love is given and returned. And the gesture, subdued into a gravity almost sorrowful (as if love and the thought of death came always together, the thought of the only ending of a mortal eternity), renders the inmost meaning of the music as no Italian gesture, which is the vehemence of first thoughts and the excitement of the senses, could ever render it. That slow rhythm, which in Wagner is like the rhythm of the world flowing onwards from its first breathing out of chaos, as we hear it in the opening notes of the "Ring," seems to broaden outwards like

ripples on an infinite sea, throughout the whole work of Wagner.

And now turn from this elemental music, in which the sense of all human things is expressed with the dignity of the elements themselves, to all other operatic music, in which, however noble the music as music (think of Gluck, of Mozart, of Beethoven!), it is for the most part fettered to a little accidental comedy or tragedy, in which two lovers are jealous, or someone is wrongly imprisoned, or a libertine seduces a few women. Here music is like a god speaking the language of savages, and lowering his supreme intellect to the level of their speech. The melodious voice remains, but the divine meaning has gone out of the words. Only in Wagner does God speak to men in his own language.

# CONCLUSION

## A PARADOX ON ART

Is it not part of the pedantry of letters to limit the word art, a little narrowly, to certain manifestations of the artistic spirit, or, at all events, to set up a comparative estimate of the values of the several arts, a little unnecessarily? Literature, painting, sculpture, music, these we admit as art, and the persons who work in them as artists; but dancing, for instance, in which the performer is at once creator and interpreter, and those methods of interpretation, such as the playing of musical instruments, or the conducting of an orchestra, or acting, have we scrupulously considered the degree to which these also are art, and their executants, in a strict sense, artists?

If we may be allowed to look upon art as something essentially independent of its material, however dependent upon its own ma-

terial each art may be, in a secondary sense, it will scarcely be logical to contend that the motionless and permanent creation of the sculptor in marble is, as art, more perfect than the same sculptor's modelling in snow, which, motionless one moment, melts the next, or than the dancer's harmonious succession of movements which we have not even time to realise individually before one is succeeded by another, and the whole has vanished from before our eyes. Art is the creation of beauty in form, visible or audible, and the artist is the creator of beauty in visible or audible form. But beauty is infinitely various, and as truly beauty in the voice of Sarah Bernhardt or the silence of Duse as in a face painted by Leonardo or a poem written by Blake. A dance, performed faultlessly and by a dancer of temperament, is as beautiful, in its own way, as a performance on the violin by Ysaye or the effect of an orchestra conducted by Richter. In each case the beauty is different, but, once we have really attained beauty, there can be no question of superiority.

Beauty is always equally beautiful; the degrees exist only when we have not yet attained beauty.

And thus the old prejudice against the artist to whom interpretation in his own special form of creation is really based upon a misunderstanding. Take the art of music. Bach writes a composition for the violin: that composition exists, in the abstract, the moment it is written down upon paper, but, even to those trained musicians who are able to read it at sight, it exists in a state at best but half alive; to all the rest of the world it is silent. Ysaye plays it on his violin, and the thing begins to breathe, has found a voice perhaps more exquisite than the sound which Bach heard in his brain when he wrote down the notes. Take the instrument out of Ysaye's hands, and put it into the hands of the first violin in the orchestra behind him; every note will be the same, the same general scheme of expression may be followed, but the thing that we shall hear will be another thing, just as much Bach, perhaps, but, because Ysaye is wanting, not

the work of art, the creation, to which we have just listened.

That such art should be fragile, evanescent, leaving only a memory which can never be realised again, is as pathetic and as natural as that a beautiful woman should die young. To the actor, the dancer, the same fate is reserved. They work for the instant, and for the memory of the living, with a supremely prodigal magnanimity. Old people tell us that they have seen Desclée, Taglioni; soon no one will be old enough to remember those great artists. Then, if their renown becomes a matter of charity, of credulity, if you will, it will be but equal with the renown of all those poets and painters who are only names to us, or whose masterpieces have perished.

Beauty is infinitely various, always equally beautiful, and can never be repeated. Gautier, in a famous poem, has wisely praised the artist who works in durable material:

> Oui, l'œuvre sort plus gelle
> D'une forme au travail
> Rebelle,
> Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.

No, not more beautiful; only more lasting.

> Tout passe. L'art robuste
> Seul a l'éternité.
> Le buste
> Survit à la cité.

Well, after all, is there not, to one who regards it curiously, a certain selfishness, even, in this desire to perpetuate oneself or the work of one's hands; as the most austere saints have found selfishness at the root of the soul's too conscious, or too exclusive, longing after eternal life? To have created beauty for an instant is to have achieved an equal result in art with one who has created beauty which will last many thousands of years. Art is concerned only with accomplishment, not with duration. The rest is a question partly of vanity, partly of business. An artist to whom posterity means anything very definite, and to whom the admiration of those who will live after him can seem to promise much warmth in the grave, may indeed refuse to waste his time, as it seems to him, over temporary successes. Or he may shrink from the continuing ardour of

one to whom art has to be made over again with the same energy, the same sureness, every time that he acts on the stage or draws music out of his instrument. One may indeed be listless enough to prefer to have finished one's work, and to be able to point to it, as it stands on its pedestal, or comes to meet all the world, with the democratic freedom of the book. All that is a natural feeling in the artist, but it has nothing to do with art. Art has to do only with the creation of beauty, whether it be in words, or sounds, or colour, or outline, or rhythmical movement; and the man who writes music is no more truly an artist than the man who plays that music, the poet who composes rhythms in words no more truly an artist than the dancer who composes rhythms with the body, and the one is no more to be preferred to the other, than the painter is to be preferred to the sculptor, or the musician to the poet, in those forms of art which we have agreed to recognise as of equal value.

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